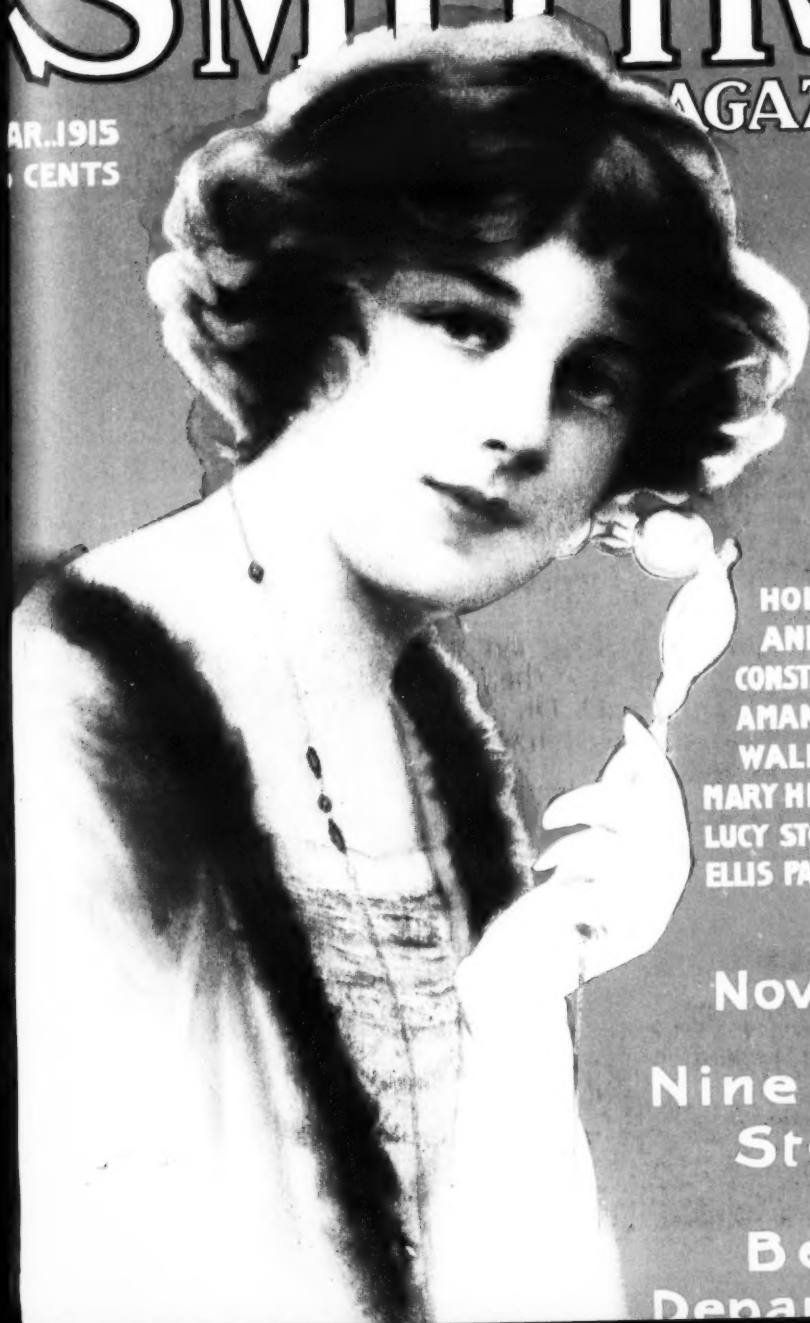


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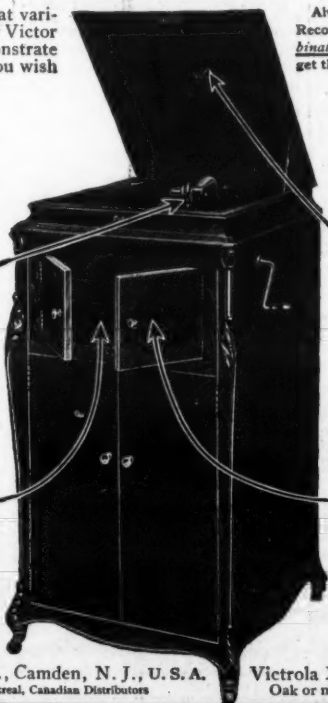
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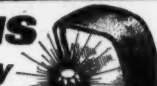
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SMITH'S MAGAZINE

VOLUME 20

MARCH, 1915

NUMBER 6

When the Pie Was Opened

By Amanda Mathews

ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERT A. GRAEF

Sing a song of sixpence, a pocket full of rye,
Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie.
When the pie was opened, the birds began to sing.
Wasn't that a dainty dish to set before the king?
The king was in his countinghouse, counting up his money.
The queen was in the parlor, eating bread and honey.
The maid was in the garden, hanging out the clothes.
Along came a blackbird and nipped off her nose.

CHAPTER I.

THE curtain of the Whistleville Opera House was due to rise in fifteen minutes. Shows were too infrequent for the theater to be provided with stage hands; consequently the minor characters had to be dressed in time to set the scenes. A rubicund rustic in realistic jeans was tacking down the grass before the cottage door. Another, in bib overalls with one strap carefully lacking, was thrusting a cross, sleepy, genuine hen into a peaked chicken coop and arranging artificial downy chicks in the adjacent green. A middle-aged man inclining toward stockiness, who wore gray burnusides and a pepper-and-salt suit with sagging pockets, strode about giving orders. This was Samuel Flemming, manager, proprietor, and leading character actor.

"Here, you, set them chickens so some are going and some are coming, like there was sense to them, and pick that one off his back!" he commanded. This speech might have belonged to

Obadiah Butterfield, Flemming's rôle in "Rustic Hearts," the play for which the stage was being prepared.

"Lordy, but you're fretful!" retorted the admonished one. "Whistleville's not strong on art."

"Maybe 'tain't, but it's strong on chickens. Besides, I was reading t'other day that Belasco's no more genius than you nor me. It's just his everlasting feeling for detail."

The first rustic jerked up his hand, and tenderly examined a punctured finger.

"I'm not Belasco, but I was feeling for de tail of that tack, and I found it," he observed plaintively.

The city villain, in nobby checked suit and paste diamonds, rested a foot on the chicken coop as he turned up the hem of a trouser leg.

"How long you had this play on the road?" he demanded of Flemming.

"Fifteen years, and a good horse it's been."

"It's pretty near a dead old horse

now. Won't go, except in bum little towns like Whistleville. You'd better knock it on the head and bury the bones."

"Look-a-here!" returned the other rather warmly. "Don't you draw your pay regular?"

"I do, old man. You're on the dead square, and I'd knock down any guy who maintained you wasn't. I'm just talking for your good." He creased the other trouser hem.

"I hired a playwright who hadn't arrived yet and was downright hungry to write me this play on day's wages."

"Who ever heard of a playwright working by the day like a carpenter?"

"This chap was tickled to get two dollars a day and his meal ticket. Having him hired like that, I didn't feel it was imposing on him none to tinker it over till it suited. I never had the education to write a play single-handed, but I always know what I want so close that having anybody else do it for me's like trying to fire a stone at a crow with another man's arm."

"It's been a good play, by Jupiter," defended the first rustic. "It's got a lot of stuff which is unctuous yet, but it's time you had your man carpenter you another."

"He's got on since that time, but he'll fix me up something for next season. I want a character part for the lead."

"If you go out with a play like that, you'll have to hold the audience's nose to get it down. They want youth. They demand the youthful hero. Why, nobody knows how to be truly heroic but the very young," declared the city villain.

"You interrupt yourself and find out if the safety curtain is in working order."

"Old-maid heroine?" scoffed the villain over his shoulder.

"I might do worse," answered Flemming. "What's a play, anyway, but an explosion of human feelings? What

can explode so lively as that which has been bottled up past its time? What's an old maid but a bottled-up woman? Run along, sonny!"

"You'll lose money on it," growled the villain, from a slowly increasing distance. "When it comes to love, the public won't stand for canned goods."

Flemming turned away to survey the incoming audience through a peephole in the drop curtain. His make-up and costuming did not seem superimposed. He had only deepened his native facial wrinkles until they could be read across the theater. All the expression areas of his face were mapped with lines which indicated either shrewd kindness or kindly shrewdness, depending on which of his two predominating characteristics held surface position for the moment.

He was watching a moderate number of the leading citizens of Whistleville come in and take their seats. Some of them he had known as country boys when he was himself a lad on a farm in this very township, a freckle-nosed imp with a faculty for mimicking every live thing about the place, human or otherwise. His resolve to become an actor dated from the night when a barnstorming company had performed "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in the country schoolhouse. His dramatic career had begun at twenty. Since that time he had built up a modest but solid success in pastoral serio-comedy work, for which he drew freely on his early environment.

Altogether, it was no wonder that Samuel Flemming scarcely knew himself apart from Obadiah Butterfield. The rôle was like a uniform which a careless official does not put off when he smokes his evening pipe. Flemming usually signed himself "Butterfield" on hotel registers and sometimes on checks. The speech of Samuel was more cultured than the speech of Obadiah. Butterfield wore burnsidcs, while Flemming

did not. Obadiah had the habit of soliloquy; so had Flemming.

The audience was dribbling in leisurely, but the academy boys acting as ushers for free admissions fairly skated along the aisles and banged down the seats with self-important responsibility. There were plenty of gum-chewing girls in peekaboo waists and picture hats. The ratio of accompanying swains did not exceed one swain to every four girls.

Behind the curtain the city villain and the two rustics were finishing the setting of the stage with so much banter and clatter that the voice of Flemming muttering at the peephole was audible only to himself.

"W h y ,
they're 'most
a l l kids. Do
they take this
for a merry-
go-round? I
got it! I was

right absent-minded to hit Whistleville on prayer-meeting night. There's a good twenty-five dollars' worth of deacons and their families missing. I might have gone to Laketown. It would adjourn prayer meeting before it would miss a good show."

He turned to inspect the leading lady and the leading man, whose voices he heard behind him. The lady was in white sunbonnet and pink gingham dress, the man in brown corduroys.

"You two look like summer boarders



The academy boys acting as ushers for free admissions fairly skated along the aisles and banged down the seats with self-important responsibility.

fiddling with the simple life," he criticized. "Crumple up that sunbonnet a bit, and you, young chap, don't forget the new line I gave you about this being a fancy kind of tie you been practicing tying on the bedpost. That's good for a laugh and some hands in any of these little towns."

The leading couple had recently been recruited from the amateur ranks, but behind their chief's back they smiled at each other with tolerant superiority.

"Ready? All set? Shall I douse the house glims?" inquired the villain.

"Hold on a bit!" answered the manager, working his finger tip around in the peephole to make it larger.

"What for, old man? It's ten minutes late now and we're as ready as we'll ever be."

"I'm looking at a lady," Flemming explained. "I may want to put her into my new play," he added in dignified reproval of the chuckles and giggles behind him.

The woman had advanced well into the back part of the theater before she came within his limited range of sight. She stepped rapidly and nervously, at the same time opening her leather hand bag, slipping her seat check into the purse within the bag, and closing both. She hastened down an aisle without waiting for an usher. When one stopped her, quite an explanation was manifestly necessary before, in a mortified flurry, she produced the seat check.

The usher conducted her to a place next the central aisle in the third row. This brought her so near Samuel Flemming that he could study her face. It was long, with rather drooping lines, yet well fleshed, regular of feature, and delicate in coloring. She was of medium stature, and stiffly dressed in a black-and-white-checked silk, very high in the neck and long in the sleeves. Her hat was a black sailor, mercilessly unbecoming. When seated, she was in-

stantly so intent on staring about her that the usher had to recover her attention in order to return her seat check. She continued to hold it wonderingly in her hand, evidently not daring to put it out of sight again.

"By gum, she's never been in a theater before!" mumbled Flemming. "And she ain't the springiest kind of a chicken, either. Look at her hoping nobody will notice her. She's played hooky from prayer meeting! Say, perhaps she don't walk right into my new drama! Perhaps she don't! There's something about her gives the heartstrings a mighty yank. She's a poor little innocent jailbird escaped for once from the brick jail of duty and conscience."

The audience started a desultory clapping and stamping to indicate righteous impatience.

"House lights off! Stage lights on! Ring her up!" were Flemming's orders to the villain.

CHAPTER II.

"Rustic Hearts" opens with a summer evening on the farm. Obadiah Butterfield smokes his peaceful pipe beside his cottage door. Beneath this stage calm, Flemming was in reality quite nervous about his electric fireflies in the grass, a feature recently added. The villain, however, manipulated the fireflies in a masterly manner. He was an excellent stage mechanic and electrician who insisted on being a poor actor.

Flemming was clever enough to let the still life and the fireflies have their full chance at the audience before the dialogue began. Whistleville did not have many sensations; consequently it was glad to round out each to the utmost. The fireflies were vouchsafed a ripple of applause.

Flemming's next care was to locate the lady of the black-and-white-checked silk. Her face was easy to find in the

segment distinguishable by the light from the stage. She was leaning forward, her lips parted as if her breath were fairly suspended. She had brown eyes and reddish-brown hair.

At this point his observation was curtailed by the entrance of the two rustics. They are farm hands; each is starting out to call on his choicest girl and arrange for conducting her to the village dance set for a fortnight ahead. The audience was allowed also to glean the information that Obadiah Butterfield himself is a prosperous widower with one idolized daughter.

Phyllis, the daughter, comes to him from the house. She wears her sunbonnet, though the sun has been down for some time. She sits on the arm of her father's chair, and rubs her fresh young face against his weather-beaten one, and runs her fingers through his gray hair.

The audience sighed happily. The most townified of them were only a generation removed from the farm; the girls in peekaboo waists all had country uncles and cousins. Few if any of these girls or their country cousins sat on the arms of their fathers' chairs when the latter smoked their evening pipes. But the thought of many was voiced by one girl, who whispered to her companion: "Say, I'd sort of enjoy doing like that with pa, but it would seem so funny and he's not used to such ways and wouldn't know what to make of them." Certain middle-aged citizens felt a wistful stir of wonder why some favorite daughter didn't "kitten round" them similarly. Altogether, it was a minute of sentimentality for which nobody was the worse.

Around the stiff cape of the leading lady's sunbonnet, Flemming stole another look at the woman in the third row. Her face wore a shining, dewy joyousness of filial affection, exceeding that of Phyllis on the stage.

Obadiah Butterfield and his daughter

engage in touching conversation. He laments that now, just as she is blossoming into womanhood, she has no mother to advise and guide. Phyllis assures him that he is father and mother both to her half-orphaned state. He begs accurate information regarding the present condition of her affections. Whom does she love? Is it Silas Clark? The leading man in brown corduroys, awaiting his cue at the left, enters. No, no, she has known him all her life. She craves a hero from afar, a story-book knight. Isn't she a little goose? She admits it with a laugh and a kiss, and goes inside the cottage, apparently to set the bread to rise, but really in order that Brown Corduroys may lay bare his manly heart to the father and hold forth eloquently on his abiding love for Phyllis. The old man approves his suit, but advises him to be patient and let the girl dream her dreams.

Phyllis, summoned from the bread-making, goes to walk with Silas Clark. Obadiah Butterfield's old-maid neighbor appears with a rooted rose slip for his garden, and a practical-minded widow, his neighbor on the other side, comes with a setting of eggs for his clucking hen. Each tries to discountenance and outstay the other.

In the midst of this scene, Flemming caught a direct eye flash from the lady of the checked silk. He experienced a curious, pleasurable agitation, which was promptly negated by his perception that the flash was not for him personally, hardly for his acting. It merely conveyed her delight in the cleverness of Obadiah Butterfield.

The city villain appears, ostensibly engaged in buying up eggs for a commission merchant. Corduroys brings Phyllis back. By some feminine aberration, she is instantly attracted to the flashing counterfeit of a man. Whereupon, naturally, Corduroys is in distress.

Down in the third row, the checked

lady looked as if she were refraining with difficulty from uttering the warning word between her lips.

After the curtain had descended,



"By gum, she's never been in a theater before!" mumbled Fleming.

while the stage was being reset for the country dance in the village hall, Flemming again resorted to the peephole. He watched the woman come out of her dream, looking awkward, self-conscious, almost plain. She stared down into her lap as if to avoid any recognizing glance from those about her.

During the second act, reckless Phyllis dances with no one but the stranger, defies her father, flouts her doting Corduroys, and finally runs away with the city villain.

Flemming's dominating interest lay in tracing the varying emotions of the lady across the footlights. This act left her pondering sorrowfully, as he ascertained from his usual vantage point.

"I don't like to see you that cast down, my dear," he softly apostrophized, "but if folks didn't act up cantankerously there wouldn't be any plays. Cheer up! So far ain't nothing to what's coming."

During the next act, Phyllis is found in a city resort of a more than questionable nature. She is saved by a police raid. She clings to the prison matron and begs that her father be sent for. The checked lady could not have appeared more pained if she had been elder sister to the woebegone heroine.

Back at the farm, of course, for the fourth act; the usual crushed and repentant maiden; the usual forgiveness and reconciliation held off until right against the final curtain. This audience was not of the sophisticated sort to reach for wraps as soon as the father exhibited the first sign of relenting. They waited to drain the scene to its last drop.

The checked lady lingered, crying softly into her handkerchief, until the others in her row were on their feet wanting to get past her. Then she rose hastily, fled Cinderella fashion up the aisle, and was lost in the crowd about the door.

CHAPTER III.

Early the following afternoon, Melissa Dawes, attired in black-and-white-checked silk and black sailor hat, stepped briskly along the board walk of an elm-lined cottage street in Whistleville. The cylindrical parcel wrapped in a bit of newspaper indicated with entire correctness to any fellow citizen she met that she had spent the night away from home. Melissa opened the front gate of the trimmest cottage set in the best-tended garden of the block. She followed the narrow board walk around the house to the back porch and entered the kitchen.

Mrs. Dawes was washing dishes at the sink. She was a tall woman, rather handsome, with abundant iron-gray hair and the long, regular features that had been copied in Melissa's face. The sagging of the lines of expression just beginning to be hinted in the daughter's countenance was a thousand times more pronounced in the mother's. She wore a neat wrapper of black calico enlivened with white polka dots.

"So you're back, Lissy." Her voice expressed little warmth, but it had an evenly regulated quality that was rather pleasant.

"Yes, mother." Melissa seated herself on a kitchen chair, where her mother could not see her unless she turned for that express purpose.

"Was Aunt Mary and Uncle Jed pleased to see you?"

"They seemed to be."

"Was they in good health?"

"They didn't complain any."

"What did they put on the table for supper?"

"Pork chops, dried-apple sauce, fried potatoes, biscuits, cake, and rhubarb pie."

"What kind of cake?"

"Marble."

"I give her that recipe, but she ain't



When seated, she was instantly so intent on staring about her that the usher had to recover her attention in order to return her seat check.

the best cook in the world, nor your Uncle Jed the best provider. Did you go to prayer meeting along with them?"

Melissa flushed uncomfortably.

"No, mother. I had—a headache—and I went—to my room—real early. Uncle and aunt attended."

"I was counting on hearing how the Baptists conduct their meeting. Was you sleeping in that wing bedroom with the outside door?"

"Yes, mother."

"What sort of cover has she got on that bureau?"

"I never noticed."

"You are the worst one not to notice! Maybe you won't see no change when you go upstairs to your room."

"Mother!" Melissa darted out of the kitchen and up the closed stairway leading to the two cottage chambers above. She stood in the middle of her own room. It still smelled of fresh paste. The new paper had a stiff red poppy, with two bright green leaves, endlessly repeated, on a yellow ground.

Melissa viewed it with starting tears of vexation. Very quietly, however, she removed her hat and stowed it away in its box on the closet shelf, then changed her checked silk for a black-and-white print dress. From a stand near the bed she picked up an illuminated motto, "He Who Conquereth His Own Spirit is Greater Than He That Taketh a City." She looked at it thoughtfully, went to her bureau for pins, checked herself, then propped it up on her writing table. She knew that her mother would not allow her to pin anything on the newly papered wall.

With another shuddering glance at the red poppies, the woman dropped on her knees by the bed and prayed aloud: "Dear God, help me to control my own spirit. Help me not to say anything ugly to mother about this wall paper."

Yet as she stood up, her God might have heard her mutter: "It's not fair! Mother's welcome to regulate all the rest of the house, but she might let me have my own room the way I want it."

She returned to the kitchen with lagging steps.

"Melissy, I wish you'd pick up your feet when you walk. Your way of going is plumb shiftless."

The daughter seated herself in the same chair. Her mother was putting the last of the dishes into the cupboard. She turned sharply.

"Well?"

"Thank you, mother."

"You don't act awful grateful."

"How can I when I told you I wanted plain buff with no pattern?"

"There's no sense to paper like that. It would show every spot, and besides it don't give the eye nothing to take hold of."

Melissa pinched her lower lip between her even white teeth lest she reply.

"It's time these dish towels was rinsed out, Lissy. I wonder if you'd ever do it of your own accord if I didn't speak of it."

Melissa took down the dishpan, emptied into it the hot water from the tea-kettle, refilled the kettle, and rubbed vigorously at the towels, trying to work off some of her nervous irritation.

"I'll go now and change my wrapper. The minister's wife is likely to call any afternoon this week."

A few minutes later Melissa shut herself into her room. She shivered and tried to hold her gaze from the wall paper. Beneath the window stood a small haircloth trunk which had once held her "doll rags." From this she now dragged forth a torn scarf, a rusty mourning veil, worn-out slippers brave with gilding, and a red plaid shawl.

She rolled these articles into a hasty bundle, donned an old shade hat, and left the room. She started so that she nearly dropped her burden when her mother appeared unexpectedly at the foot of the stairs.

"Melissy, you never hung out them dish towels! I declare to goodness you

ain't all here! You get more worthless about the little I require of you every day you live."

"I forgot, mother. I'll hang them out now."

"What you got there and where you taking it?"

"Just some old things, and I'm going to McKee's barn to practice my piece for the Sunday-school entertainment."

"I'd be mortified for you not to be here if the minister's wife comes."

"I can't stay in every afternoon waiting for her."—She brushed by her mother, dropped her bundle on a kitchen chair, and picked up the dish towels. Her mother had followed her.

"You ain't hurt your health none staying in to-day. You're just landed in the house after a visit. What you going to speak at the sociable?"

"Curfew Must Not Ring Tonight."

"I wish you'd choose something quieter like. Those pieces where you turn all your feelings loose don't seem quite decent. Whatever would become of us if we didn't hold ourselves in?"

"We'd be a lot better off!"

"If you ain't your father over again, riz up to pester and confound me! He had a lot more feelings than ever done him any good. It was his sociable feelings led him into drinking and play-actor company and the like, so he was no use for steady work."

"But, mother——"

"Oh, I know what you're going to throw up to me—that after he got so worthless he had me compelled to disgrace myself by going through divorce and smashing them solemn words in the marriage service about better or worse, and maybe having that set against me in the judgment book; then him to go and marry that little idiot of a Helen Mansfield over at Hawk's Station, imposing on her completely, and, just to make a fool of me, turning round and earning her a good living.

They say she's praiseful of him in a way that's sinful, and them feelings of his keep him living up to what she says he's like."

"Mother, perhaps if you had appreciated——"

"There wasn't nothing about him to appreciate when I had him."

The younger woman sighed hopelessly, and passed out to the clothesline with the dish towels. The elder one went upstairs to dress for the possible caller. Melissa returned to the kitchen for her bundle, and then started across lots to McKee's barn. She walked slowly, and her feet dragged in the manner to which her mother objected.

CHAPTER IV.

McKee's barn was the last reminder that this portion of Whistleville had been carved out of an old farm. The deserted, tumble-down structure sunned itself in an expanse of unsold lots. It was considered an eyesore in the neighborhood, but was left to the slow demolishing of time and the hope that some tramp passing the night there might accidentally burn it down.

Melissa first glanced into the old harness room and the rotting stalls, to be sure that the place was not already tenanted by some vagabond of the road. A sort of platform, which had once supported farm wagons, made an excellent stage. The lower, unfloored portion of the barn was now grown up to burdocks; these furnished an imaginary audience. On each side stood open the great doors which had once admitted huge loads of hay. A harness room opened off one end of the platform and constituted the dressing room. Melissa had abstracted a small cracked mirror from the house to use here. The harness pegs served as hooks for her scanty costume array. An old chopping block on the platform did duty as a seat.

When satisfied that she had the place to herself, Melissa dropped down on the chopping block and listlessly allowed the bundle to roll from her lap to her feet. Her shoulders relaxed and her head drooped forward. She was regretting that she had not made her escape to her present refuge without her mother's knowing where she was. On the rare occasions when she could do this, her afternoon in the barn amounted to a revel. If her mother knew she was there, Melissa felt herself still held in that dominating mental vise, and consequently could not practice her amateur elocutionary feats with any spontaneity.

But she was there, and "Curfew" must be gone through with. She could at least test her memory of the poem. She ran through it in a monotone. Then she stood and delivered the opening lines to the burdocks. They went haltingly.

Again she sat down on the chopping block. This time her thoughts turned to the play she had secretly witnessed the evening before. At the time she had merely lived in it like an imaginative child, but now she passed it in review as a marvelous dramatic performance. Her zest intensified as she recalled scene after scene. She forgot her mother and forgot "Curfew." She dashed into her dressing room and back again, bringing a scarf, a bonnet, and a shawl. She laid these articles on the chopping block, ready to be assumed in turn. Then she flung herself into impromptu renditions from "Rustic Hearts." She was the simpering spinster with the rose slip, the solid widow with the eggs, Phyllis coquetting with her lovers at the country dance, Phyllis pleading with her father to be taken back into his life.

In the midst of this concluding scene, to her horror, Melissa perceived the shadow of a man projected across a trampled place in front of the western

door. She stopped with a gasp. One of those dreaded tramps, of course! She must slip out through the harness room and make a run for the back stoop of the nearest neighbor.

Too late! The man already stood in the doorway.

"Don't be frightened, Miss Dawes," he said reassuringly.

"I—I—don't know you," she faltered, realizing at the same time that his person and voice were strangely familiar.

"Yet I heard you just now begging my forgiveness."

He stepped to where the light from both doors fell strong upon him. He was dressed in a plain gray business suit, instead of the pepper-and-salt with the sagging pockets, and his burnsides were missing. For all that, identification was easy.

"Mr.—Mr. Butterfield?" she stammered.

"That same," he answered, and started toward her.

She regarded his approach tensely, with dilated eyes, and drew back toward the harness room.

The actor stopped and chuckled. He assumed his Obadiah speech as perhaps more likely to inspire confidence.

"Why, durn it, if the girl ain't afeard of me!"

"You're—a play actor," she explained tremulously.

The man returned to the western door.

"I—I—didn't mean——" she quavered after him.

In the doorway he wheeled.

"I won't come no nearer without your permission, 'pon my honor. I saw you at the opera house last night, third row near center. I want to make some talk with you."

"How did you find——"

"Described you to landlady at hotel, who furnished me with your name and residence. Only she said I must be mistaken, your mother being dead set

against playhouses as one of the main strongholds of the Evil One."

"Mother mustn't find out that I went."

"She won't from me."

"Did she send you over here?"

"Not a bit of it! I was ambling about, wondering what would happen if I rang your doorbell, when I providentially glimpsed you scooting 'cross lots; so I followed."

"And you've been listening?"

"Sure! No eavesdropping about listening to my own play, is there?"

"I must have been—very funny—to you!"

"Nope! Glad I heard you. My company has gone ahead to Hawk's Station, where we play to-night. I stayed to look you up, if I could, and catch the six o'clock."

"What could you want with me, Mr.—Mr.—Butterfield? I suppose that's not really your name."

"The name on my tombstone will be Samuel Flemming, but it ain't yet inscribed, and meanwhile you're free to choose."

"You said, Mr. Flemming, that you want to talk with me."

"Miss Dawes, I have more to say than I can conveniently shout across this barn. Will you not either invite me within conversational distance or else join me on this remnant of old stone wall outside?"

Melissa hesitated. The stone wall was safer, but it was on her own side of the barn and her mother might see them. She felt the sudden exhilaration of an exciting and romantic adventure.

"Come inside. I'm sure I can trust you."

His good-naturedly amused chuckle made her feel very foolish. She took the block, while he seated himself on the edge of the platform about twelve feet away.

"This is more like it. Now, Miss Dawes, look here. My overhearing you

was better than a try-out, where you'd be all tied into knots with manager fright, which is a hundred times worse than stage fright."

"A 'try-out'—what is that for?"

"For a job, my dear child."

"But I'm not looking for a job."

"That I quite believe, but I've come to offer you one, unsolicited. First time I ever did such a thing."

Her head nearly swam off her shoulders in her sudden elation.

"You consider that I have talent?"

"You've got something; but while it's late for you to begin, it's too soon to tell. Your face isn't the youngest nor the prettiest there is, but it's a speaking face, which is more important, and that kind often don't fairly come into its own before thirty. And your voice is a little wonder; not vital and magnetic, as it could be—you live too bottled up for that—but it's got pathetic undertones to beat many headliners, and a sobbing quality that might bring an audience to its feet some day. How you came by a voice like that in this nasal-twanged town, I give up. But you've got it!"

"I'm so glad—so very glad!" she cried earnestly. "It's good of you to encourage me. But I couldn't go on the stage and be a play actress. My mother—"

"Look here, girl! Who's living your life—you or your mother?"

"It's not me!" she flashed back. "It's never been me, and it won't be when I'm a hundred! But I'm all she has, and I can't leave her."

"If she's the husky old party I saw knitting by the front window, and looking like she scorned even to have herself beholden to the back of her chair by leaning against it—if that's her, it seems as if you could stay away part of the time."

"Oh, to go—to see—to move—to feel—to live! But I must be resigned to my lot."



"So you're back, Lissy." Her voice expressed little warmth, but it had an evenly regulated quality that was rather pleasant.

"Resigned tommysticks! Lots get awfully mixed. How do you know that you're not languishing on somebody else's lot while another person is cavorting round on your lot? To explain: Your life here would fit some semi-disabled old relative just fine. Said relative could have a good home and be company for your mother while you get out and live your own life in glee and freedom. What's wrong with being happy in your work? What a wicked outfit the birds must be!"

"Why did you come here and make me realize more than ever? It will only seem worse after this."

"My dear, did you ever hear about

two dozen blackbirds in a pie and how they began to sing when the pie was opened up? Well, when I saw you at my play, I knew you for what you are—one little whitebird baked in a pie—and I thinks to myself that I'd like to be the one to open that pie and hear you begin to sing."

There was a sudden rush of tears to the young woman's eyes. She swished them away impatiently.

"Please excuse my being so weak and foolish."

"Don't mind me," he comforted her. "Poetically speaking, my starched collar's used to it."

She looked over at him curiously. Then the big kindness of him swept away her last reserve.

"It's awful to say about your own mother—it would serve me right if a thunderbolt struck me dead—I never said this to a soul before in my whole life—but I don't like her! I don't! I don't! I love her, you know, because she's my mother, but I don't like her any better than I would any other bossy, nagging old woman! She has 'most everybody under condemnation in her mind except me, and I only escape by being her own flesh and blood and 'most never opposing her, and even so I'm halfway under pretty much of the time. I'm so tired of my days I wish they were over!"

"Take your life, Melissa Dawes, and

live it! I'll see that you get your chance. I'll train you myself and give you a small part right away, so you can begin earning. I'll get another woman written into 'Rustic Hearts' on purpose for you."

"No, no! I did wrong to run off to that play, and out of wrong nothing but wrong can come. You mean kind, but it's no use. Perhaps I'll get reconciled."

A demanding voice carried across the field: "Melissy! Melissy!"

The woman rose from the chopping block.

"That's mother calling me. I suppose the minister's wife has come. I'll have to go."

"I'll walk back with you and explain to your mother——"

"No, please—you mustn't! She'd never get over my talking with a play actor, and she'd forbid my coming to this barn any more, and it's my only outlet. You wait until I'm gone and then take that other path back to town."

"Melissy! Melissy!"

This time the voice was nearer. Mrs. Dawes was calling from the back gate.

"Good-by, Mr. Flemming, and thank you! I'll never forget your goodness!"

"Good-by, Melissa Dawes."

They shook hands, and the woman hurried away. From his position inside the barn, the man could watch her hurrying homeward.

"There'll be a right sizable explosion if she ever happens to get set off," he soliloquized.

CHAPTER V.

The following morning Melissa entered the kitchen and found her mother making rhubarb pies.

"Here, Lissy, I'm glad you've come to put some more wood in the stove, so I won't have to take my hands out of the pie crust."

Melissa was heavy-eyed and sallow.

Absently she went to the wood box and took out a large, round stick.

"Good gracious! You don't think that's any sort for pies, do you? Pick out some bark and small stuff. You've been the dumbest thing ever since you got up!"

The daughter obediently replenished the fire according to directions. Then she retreated to the back steps and sat there, hunched over moodily. The battle that she had been fighting all night was still on. She had suffered agonies of remorse, to begin with, for having complained of her home life to a stranger. Several times she had even risen from bed and listened at her mother's door to hear her breathe. She had fully resolved that in the morning she would throw her arms around her neck and kiss her.

But alas! Not having fallen asleep until the early dawn, when she had at last dropped off, she had overslept. She had found her mother eating breakfast. Mrs. Dawes had greeted the late comer with a rasping joke about being a fine lady boarder. She had not meant it ill-naturedly, but it had grated on Melissy's edgy nerves and there had been no kissing. Neither had the daughter made any defense or retort. She had choked down a cup of coffee in silence and then busied herself with the dishes and the beds. It was upon descending the stairs after completing the latter task that she had found her mother at the pies.

Other agonies to fill her night had been those of renunciation. "He who loseth his life shall find it." She would lose hers in being a good daughter. Over and over she had crept out of bed and prayed about it on her knees until a sort of peace had come, when she would wearily creep back, believing the question settled at last. But the peace would not hold. Surging up through it would come rebellious protests against the futility and injustice

of her situation. She was the one without a living interest; her mother conducted the home and looked after two other cottages which she rented. Also, she had a farm "let out on shares" to a bachelor named Jennings. She took an agricultural journal, and had a keen brain for crops and profits.

As for herself, Melissa had nothing but certain childish duties about the house, her Sunday-school class, and her recitations at church entertainments. She was too sensitive about her age to mingle with the young people, too essentially youthful in spirit to relegate herself to the elderly women's Dorcas Society. Her life was practically manless. She could not think when she had spent so many consecutive minutes in masculine company as yesterday at the barn. In the lonely dullness of her days, she had even harbored secret wishes in regard to Farmer Jennings, who never even glanced her way.

Sitting on the step, Melissa clung desperately to her resolution not to accept Mr. Flemming's offer, but all the spiritual grace of the renunciation had vanished in the old, familiar friction with her mother.

Our lives swing in curious cycles, usually unnoted by ourselves. Melissa Dawes had quite forgotten a certain spring morning of her childhood, when she had nursed her doll and her wrath on this very step. Then, as now, the outdrifting wave of her anger had been met and overcome by the indrifting wave of her natural sweetness of temperament.

"I won't mind about the cake if she'll just give me a cracker," she had whispered to her doll in that far time, as she had left it on the porch and gone to prefer the more modest petition. A minute later she had returned and picked up the doll.

"She says 'no' awful hard, but I don't mind, 'cause crackers aren't much anyway."

Even so did Melissa the woman, after the daisies and clover about the steps had stared her into a better mood, decide to beg the cracker of a few elocution lessons.

She reentered the kitchen just as her mother was whirling a rhubarb pie deftly with one hand, while a knife held in the other pared away the superfluous crust about the edge. Then she set down the plate, and with a fork pricked holes in the upper crust. Her daughter watched the last action with a sudden gleam of interest.

"What's that for?" Her question was purely to draw forth the answer she wanted.

"So the juice will have some place to boil out, of course. 'Most anybody would know that."

"Mother," she cried, "what chance have I to boil out? Do sit down and talk with me just a minute."

"I got that cake to start for the sociable, and I want it should follow right along after the pies. You can say anything you got to say without hendering me."

"I want to take elocution lessons."

"What for?"

"To speak pieces better."

"You speak 'em plenty good enough. 'Tain't like it was something of any use. And there's no teacher in Whistleville."

"There's one in Metropole. I could go over on the local."

"Yes, and pay train fare on top of highfalutin' prices for lessons. You know yourself that the Pine Street house is likely to be vacant soon, and that Jennings is asking for a new sulky plow and three loads of that fancy fertilizer."

"Mother, let me get out and earn money. I'd be happier and better off with something to do."

"That's foolish talk. There's plenty you might be doing this minute instead of whining round me. When the paper-

ers was here yesterday, I was powerful mortified to have them find lint under your bureau."

"What's the good of it all, mother? We get up early so's to get the work done up early so's to do nothing in the afternoon. Then we go to bed early so's we can get up early again."

"The good of it all is," Mrs. Dawes answered severely, "that you live an honest life and get your soul delivered safe back to the Lord, who started you out with it to save or lose as you see fit." She was now briskly stirring the butter and sugar together in the bottom of a big yellow bowl.

"The elocution lessons won't cost you a cent, mother. I'll earn the money."

"You'll do nothing of the sort! How would it look to the church folks? They'd be saying I was stingy with you. No, I can't have it. All that ails you is not knowing when you're well off. You've got a discontent on you which is fairly sinful!"

"I guess nothing is ever contented, mother, but a cow or an angel, and I'm neither."

"That's wicked talk! I don't see but you're a sight better off than the girls who growed up with you—most of them struggling with a raft of babies and some with husbands that ain't much. You'd 'a' been married, too, if you'd known how to fling yourself at men's heads like they done. I've had seven Dorcas women tell me they wisht their sons had taken up with you instead of some flighty little baggage. And there's Jennings—he don't look at you no more than if he had a stiff neck that wouldn't let him."

Melissa reddened.

"Mother, if I could just get clear away for a change, perhaps I'd be more contented when I came back."

"Now you put it right out of your head that you're going to leave this house unless it's a wedding or a funeral. I need your duty and your company.

You're the only human that ain't disappointed me very bad so far, and here are you trying to get foot-loose."

"Forgive me, mother."

"I ain't sure I can ever feel quite the same to you again, but I'll try. Now go to the woodpile and fetch me an apronful of bark, quick, or my cake won't rise."

Melissa shrugged hopelessly and started for the woodpile. "Crackers aren't much, anyway," she had assured her doll on that earlier occasion.

"I suppose, after all, lessons would only be an aggravation, when I'm aching to become a real play actress," was the cracker philosophy of the adult Melissa.

CHAPTER VI.

Whistleville did not derive its cheerful appellation from any accomplishment or proclivity of the first settlers. Quite the contrary. The place was so named because here trains whistled for a crossing. Originally the town site had been a favorite camp-meeting ground. The temporary collections of tents had gradually crystallized into a permanent village of an especially godly nature; no bar, billiard hall, nor theater was ever to be allowed within its dedicated precincts.

But the place grew, and the old camp-meeting stock was diluted with newcomers of a secular turn. Also, the second generation could not be kept exactly in the footsteps of their parents. The church services were attended and supported by the elder conservative element. The younger crowd compromised with parental ideals of conduct by attending only the Sunday school. A church or Sunday-school entertainment drew in a still more worldly element, which was welcomed for the money that passed from its purse to the church coffer.

The evening came for which Melissa

had been preparing. This "sociable" was one that in circus parlance would have been designated as "three-fingered." All about the Sunday-school room were booths in charge of the prettiest girls, who were on their mettle to harness their native coquetry to the service of religion. They would coax the shy dollar from the masculine pocket if it was in the least coaxable. The two other rings consisted of a program and a frolic. Dancing was under taboo as immodest, but the propriety of *fomp- ing*, scrambling "kissing games" was unquestioned.

At a certain point in the program it was announced by the presiding deacon: "We will now have the pleasure of listening to a recitation, 'Curfew Must Not Ring To-night,' by our gifted sister, Miss Melissa Dawes."

Melissa showed herself upon the platform in her black-and-white-checked silk. The skirt was rather short, in accordance with her mother's ideas of what constituted "good sense," and showed her heavy-soled walking shoes. Her hair was crimped each side of the part with a hardness and regularity of effect that suggested corrugated sheet iron. Her full-throated voice trembled on the opening lines, but soon gained confidence. It was one of her trials that her mother invariably sat in the middle of the front row—her face always betraying the same struggle between expansive pride in her daughter's performance and pursed-up disapproval of such reckless emotional abandon.

To-night her disapprobation was in the ascendant, for never had Melissa declaimed with so much elocutionary vim. A lanky, round-shouldered man, dressed in a blue suit and red tie, gave audible vent to his embarrassment in a sniff. He was Farmer Jennings. The sniff occurred when his imagination had such a moment of acute stimulation that he saw Melissa Dawes, in her checked silk and clumpy shoes, being

swung out into space hanging to the bell clapper, to save her lover.

Melissa had progressed only a few lines farther when she perceived Samuel Flemming standing over by the door. She gave a visible start, and came to a dead stop.

Her mother turned round and inquired: "Ain't anybody holding the book?"

"I—left it—at home," faltered Melissa. Her mind was the blankest of blanks, and she was just about to accept complete disgrace by leaving the platform when every one's attention, including her own, was attracted by the actor, and there was great twisting and turning to get a look at him.

"I used to know that selection," he was exclaiming tragically as he alternately wrung his hands and pressed them despairingly against his temples. "Many a time and oft in boyhood's days did I declaim it in the little red schoolhouse, but that line—that line escapes me! Gladly would I assist the young lady, but that line— If she will go back a bit and approach the fatal chasm more deliberately, I am sure I can recover—the lost line."

Suddenly Melissa realized that he was creating this diversion to take the focus of attention upon himself in order to give her a chance to recover her thread. Desperately she groped for it, and this time it did not elude her.

"Shows her hands all bruised and torn."

Melissa galloped breathlessly through the rest until she could make her discomfited escape.

Descending from the platform, her one desire was to avoid sitting by any one she knew. The benches were crowded. Some one near the aisle shoved over to make room for her. She was so embarrassed that faces blurred. Gratefully she dropped down in the proffered place.

To her great amazement, Melissa discovered that she was sitting beside her

own father, a short, jovial-looking man with a broad red face. She had been but ten when the separation had occurred, and since that time she had seen her renegade parent only occasionally and from a distance. She half rose to change her seat, but another recitation being in progress, the act would have been conspicuous.

"Don't run off, Melissa," her father begged in a rumbling whisper. "I know you can't have any friendly feelings for me—your mother would see to that—and I know I done her a gol-durned mean trick to turn out so nigh decent as I have. I don't expect her to forgive nothing, but it's you I'm studying about. She keeps you in a box with scarce cracks enough to breathe through—like she done me. I busted loose, but you put me in mind of a horn toad my brother sent me from Californy in a baking-powder can. When it got here, hornie had about give up wriggling, not seeing no use in it. There's something I wisht I could make up to you, my girl, because I could have had the cracks in your box some bigger if I'd 'a' stuck by."

Melissa was touched. "Never mind, father," she whispered back. "I understand."

"Say, Melissa, you started in fine on that piece. You come by that from



"Don't be frightened, Miss Dawes," he said reassuringly.

me. I was crazy to be an actor, but I wasn't set up right for it. I knew that Sam Flemming in them days. He's a good man—supported his old parents in comfort long as they lived and never done nobody a mean turn, while there's plenty could tell of good ones."

Melissa had a quick, feminine impulse to ask if Mr. Flemming was married, but could not get the question out.

"Say, Melissa, what you need is some elocution lessons. There's a bang-up teacher in Metropole."

"I—can't."

"She won't let you?"

"She hasn't the ready money to spare, and she don't much believe in it anyway—seems too much like play acting."

"Melissa, I'll treat you to 'em myself."

"No, no!"

"I can afford it easy."

"Mother wouldn't like it."

"I owe it to her anyway, on account of that spite judgment for alimony she got agin' me when we split the blanket, she a rich woman and me a penniless man with my hands and feet for assets."

At this juncture, the program being completed, people were leaving their seats. Mrs. Dawes stood up and looked around sharply for Melissa. She found her, delivered a glance of amazed reproach, and seated herself again with her back deliberately turned in her daughter's direction. Mr. Dawes grinned.

"That makes me feel like old times. There, there, child; run along! No use of getting her down on you, seeing you got to live with her. Sorry you won't take the lessons. You're mighty welcome."

Melissa choked up. "You're awful kind, father."

As she moved away, the thought came that she would be flagrantly ungracious and ungrateful not to thank Mr. Flemming for his clever assistance. He was still near the door, but was now the center of a group who were excitedly telling him how much they had enjoyed "Rustic Hearts." Melissa seated herself at a little distance to await her opportunity. Mr. Flemming saw her, and, skillfully disengaging himself, came and took the chair beside her.

"I—I—want to thank——"

"Don't speak of it, Melissa Dawes. I was able to get over here to-night because we were set for Metropole, and their mayor died to-day, so they asked

to have the theater dark out of respect. I wanted to see more of you before we got out of range. Going to take me up on my offer?"

"No! No! I've thought about it nights and nights, but I mustn't. And I'm ashamed to remember how I talked to you about my mother. She means all right by me—only she's dead set against my leaving home at all—she says unless it's for burying—or marrying——"

Flemming beamed.

"Why, that's dead easy. Perhaps we might arrange——"

Melissa colored furiously, and broke in: "Besides, it's just as well. You couldn't possibly have any opinion of my talent after the fizzle you saw me make to-night."

"I never said it was more than a gamble if you can get the premature rheumatism out of your emotional joints, but I'm just offering to make it my gamble and give you your chance."

"It's heavenly kind of you, but I mustn't even let myself consider it."

"You're sure?"

"Absolutely."

"That's too bad. I think you're making a mistake."

"You got me so stirred up I tried to have mother let me take elocution lessons, but she wouldn't."

"Just as well. You're not ready yet. You got a lot to do for yourself first, which I was going to set you at. I'm in the grasp of an idea. If I promise not to worry you about joining my company, couldn't I meet you once more at your old barn? I'm too far away to get back here again on a week day, but I could this coming Sunday. May I?"

Melissa looked years younger.

"There wouldn't be any use," she responded sedately, and then fairly trembled for fear he would not urge the matter.

"I want to bring you some books—

whole plays. Don't fool with pieces—they're not worth getting up steam for. And as for this 'Curfew'—I wouldn't monkey with it any more. It's what you might call——" Warned by the sensitive quivering of Melissa's mouth, he slid away from his intended joke and merely concluded: "It's been spoken a great many times."

"I won't speak it again."

"And about Sunday?"

"Oh, I've got to live! I've got to live just a little bit! I don't see any harm in it. And I trust you."

As once before, his amused twinkle made her qualms seem foolish. He consulted a local time-table, which he drew from his pocket.

"I can be there at four o'clock. Good-by till then."

Melissa watched him jocularly shake off more young people who wanted to tell him how much they had enjoyed "Rustic Hearts," and pass out.

"We'll be going home now."

The woman was startled. For the instant she had forgotten her mother, with her inevitably accumulating load of wrath.

"Very well, mother."

Not a word was spoken until they were nearly home. Then Mrs. Dawes began:

"I must say you done yourself and me proud to-night! First you forgot your piece, though you had three weeks to learn it in. Then you let folks see you hanging round your father. If you ain't no pride yourself, you might think I got a little left. Worst of all was your shining up to that actor man. And to-night of all nights, when I caught Peter Jennings noticing you two or three times. I might have brought it about so he would have walked home with you, but after your actions, I wouldn't throw you at a decent man's head."

Melissa laughed nervously.

"I don't want to be thrown at anybody's head, decent or indecent."

With which answer the front gate was reached.

CHAPTER VII.

On Sunday afternoon, Melissa walked primly along the little path across the vacant lots, in her prim checked silk and primly corrugated crimps. Her head was up, however, her step light, and the sparkle of romantic adventure in her eyes. She found Mr. Flemming waiting. They shook hands. He proffered her a small key.

"This unlocks your dressing room, Melissa Dawes."

He pointed to the door of the harness room, now straight on its hinges and closed with a padlock.

"Let yourself in!" he commanded eagerly.

Silent with wonder, Melissa obeyed. A full-length easel mirror stood opposite the window. A smaller one hung above an old box draped into a dressing table, on which stood the requisites for an actor's facial make-up. Every harness peg was supporting some magnificence of spangled velvet or shimmering silk. An open box revealed an alluring tumble of jeweled crowns, rosetted slippers, and similar fascinations. A shelf was full of books.

"Why—why——" she gasped.

"What does this mean?"

"It means work, Melissa Dawes."

"But whose——"

"The truck is mine, and I'm lending it to you. Right here is all you need to carry yourself a long way on the road. It's better than going with me—yet a bit. It's better than lessons. They wouldn't do anything now but scare you back into yourself, and you're buried too deep in there already. You must do the first spade work at digging yourself out."

"How?"





*gave audible vent to his embarrassment in a sniff. He was Farmer Jennings. Melissa had
ceived Samuel Fleming standing over by the door.*

"Come here afternoons. That won't be running counter to General Ma. Here's books and books, mostly plays, with a few novels. Read them—read them a lot of times. Get right into the characters—get into their skins. Pick out one woman character in each, and get into her skin most of all."

"Oh, glorious!"

"When you come here, you take off your corsets, let down your hair, and put on something soft and flowing and slippers or sandals on your feet. The dress you wear over, hang out of sight, and be the real Melissa Dawes."

"The real one?"

"Sure. The one I believe is under the crust. You let her get out and fly round, as it were."

"I'm afraid to trust her. She might be wicked."

"She's a better woman than you are now with your little 'fraid-cat morality, good because you're scared of mother and the Bible and the minister and God. The real Melissa Dawes is good because she couldn't help it if she wanted to. Turn her loose into these books. Not all the characters in them are angels, but her eyes are beholden to know right from wrong. Trust her."

The woman's eyes were alight.

"Nobody ever talked to me like that before," she breathed.

"Let go of your soul, girl. It's swung on a rope of which, as you might say, God holds the other end. It can't drop."

"Oh—to believe that!"

"And let go of your body. Let go of your head; it won't fall off. Let go of your hands; they're tight to your wrists."

Melissa gave her hands an ecstatic shake.

"So they are!" she laughed.

"As you are now, your thinks and feels mostly come off in your brain box. Let 'em out! Think and feel with your whole body—chest, arms, legs, hands, and feet. Live in your whole body; use

it; inhabit it. Turn your face loose and your diaphragm loose, and when you feel a feel or think a think, it can use your whole body to express itself."

"Oh, if I can! I want to! I want to!"

"Choose your character and take this grease paint to make your face into her face. Change your duds for her duds. Make your voice into her voice. Stop walking as you would walk and take her kind of steps."

"And forget myself in her?"

"While you study, yes. That's when you're getting acquainted. But after that, don't let her run you, or you'll do rotten acting—you run her. You be her, but you must *know* you're being her."

"How wonderful of you—to take all this trouble for a stranger!"

"There speaks the wrong Melissa. The right one knows that we're not strangers."

The woman flushed and sparkled charmingly. Then her face clouded.

"Will it be long," she faltered, "before you come this way again?"

"I can't possibly get back before the close of the season, and that's two or three months from now. Then I'll drop round and see what you're doing."

He parted from Melissa at the eastern door with a long handclasp, and walked away across the field. Dreamily she watched him out of sight, then returned to the harness room and clasped her hands in renewed rapture over the working array. She peered at herself in the glass.

"I wonder if it's wicked to be really alive and awake?" she queried of her own reflection. Suddenly the other Melissa looked straight at her out of the glass and flashed back "No!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"Melissy!" called Mrs. Dawes, from the back gate. Her shout was aimed in the direction of the barn.

"Yes, mother." The answer came faintly from afar.

"Come right along home. You got company." Her tone expressed a certain grim elation.

"In a minute, mother."

"Well, you hurry!"

"Yes, mother."

Fortunately the call had overtaken Melissa before she had costumed for her afternoon's dramatic study, but she was deep in "The Blue Bird." Reluctantly she withdrew her finger from her place in the book. She was just where the unborn babes await the outward swinging of heaven's gate. As she walked home, all along the path leading to the cottage gentle child sprites seemed to be gamboling on the dandelion-studded grass. They vanished quickly enough when her mother appeared on the back steps.

"It's Jennings! He come over from the farm for the fancy seed corn I got from Washington. He'll stay for supper. And he asked for you soon as he got into the house. You slip upstairs and smooth down your hair. Don't put on your silk dress—that would look too p'inted like. Next week's afternoon percale is on your bed all ironed. Lucky I done it to-day. You might put on that."

"Yes, mother," responded Melissa, a bit absently, as she passed on to the stairway.

"The longer I'm dressing, the less time I'll be obliged to sit with him," she reflected. "Isn't it queer?" her thought rambled on. "By the time a thing gets round to you, your taste for it is lost. I would have dreamed that I'd be excited and pleased up to the moon to know Jennings or any other man was down there waiting for me. Perhaps I'm getting beyond the age, or more likely it's having something else to take up my mind."

She surveyed the clean black-and-white percale on the bed. Its make was

severely plain, so that it would be easy to iron. Unhesitatingly she hung it away in her closet.

"Now will be a good chance to spring that fixed-over dress on mother, when she can't say anything before company."

Thus astutely reflecting, Melissa brought forth a garment from the darkest corner of the closet. She had discarded white when she was twenty-five, as too affectedly girlish for her years. Yet in the process of awakening at the ancient age of "over thirty," she had fashioned this gown from her high-school graduating costume of white mull. Ordinarily the girl was not clever with her needle, but now the love and understanding of beauty were permeating her even to her thimble finger. In her mother's "piece bag" she had discovered a rolled-up lining of uncompromising purple which had once belonged to a wrapper. This lining she had fashioned into a slip to wear under the white mull, which was not sufficiently transparent to let the purple show through except as the most exquisite shimmering of lavender. The neck was cut square, and the sleeves shortened to her elbows, both wildly daring innovations. Some band trimming of lavender shade, found among her dramatic properties, had been borrowed to give the needed touches of color emphasis.

Deliberately Melissa combed her hair. The corrugated sheet-iron crimps were now softened to such hinted undulations as an admiring onlooker would credit to the unaided habit of the hair itself. For the rest, she made a softly heavy coil at the nape of her neck.

Next she donned the frock, studying the effect with critical delight.

"Why, it's a pansy dress! It needs just a bunch of pansies here at the belt, and they're not in bloom yet. Oh, if I dared——"

This was her daring hour. She dashed into her closet, dragged out a hatbox, snipped a bunch of velvet pan-

sies from her last winter's black felt, and pinned them on. It was the magic final touch.

"Melissy!" rasped her mother, from the foot of the stairs.

The daughter had her hand on the knob, but she drew back.

"Coming in just a minute," she called—and then waited until she heard her mother return to the parlor.

Once Melissa's hand on the parlor doorknob would have trembled. Now it was cool and firm. She entered. The tail of her eye caught her mother's amazed stare. She ignored it and extended her hand easily to Jennings, who undoubted himself awkwardly from the low easy-chair into which his hostess had well-meaningly forced him.

"Howdy-do, Miss Melissa."

He dropped her hand and stood spell-bound by the gown, yet not venturing any spoken praise. Again he doubled himself into the low chair, while Melissa took the little rocker by the window. The mother gulped down her surprise over her daughter's appearance, and continued to hold forth on the heralded virtues of the new seed corn.

"Looks like a good thing," he responded dutifully, contriving meanwhile to dazzle his eyes with the demure lady in the pansy gown.

Melissa felt the look, and a new sense of feminine power surged through her veins and beat against her temples. In the barn, as this and that play heroine, she had carried on many a passionate heart affair with shadowy, conjured-up male beings. But always, when she had put on the black-and-white percale and started for her own porch, she had come out of the dream to find herself just the same insignificant little old maid whom no man would think of looking at twice. But to-day was momentous in that the first bridge had been built between her dream world and Whistleville. Here she was in a barn dress, feeling like the barn Melissa, behaving

like the barn Melissa, experiencing no humility of gratitude to Jennings for his admiration. She challenged him with her charms, yet yielded him no tenderness in return. Her nature was gentle and pitying to the utmost, but now was her time for carrying her head high, since her slighted womanhood was just coming into its tardy own.

The mother soon made an excuse of preparing supper to leave the room.

Then, to her own amazement, Melissa became conversational. She talked like a woman of the world, tactfully contriving to put her embarrassed companion at his ease.

She tried him on books. He confessed that he didn't get time to read, except the paper, and he owned up he fell asleep over that at the close of his day's toil. He attempted to explain that if he only had somebody real nice to talk to—but became involved in stammering confusion.

Firmly and kindly Melissa both checked his ardor and rescued him from his slough of embarrassment by changing the topic to nature.

Mountains, he avowed, sort of bothered him, because he was always calculating how high up they could be plowed and what could be done with the waste part above that; goats, he reckoned, might be made profitable. He wasn't one to die poor, and the woman he married might feel easy—

Poor Jennings winked rapidly in amazement when he found that he was being plucked from that quaking sand of sentiment and set down on the safe conversational rock of plays. He went on to state that he hadn't seen many, but give him plain, simple plays, where the girl cut the ropes and yanked her lover off the track just before the train came. And nobody need think he would keep a wife mewed up at home like some. She should see two or three shows every year and never mind the cost.

Mrs. Dawes appeared at this juncture and conducted them to the table, which was spread in the dining room instead of in the kitchen. She apologized for the plainness of the meal, which was an elaborate display of hot biscuits, cold tongue, two kinds of cake and three of preserves, pickles, and headcheese. Jennings assured his hostess that each separate viand was the "beatenest ever," and general good humor prevailed.

The mother endeavored to have the young couple return to the parlor, but Melissa daringly suggested that Mr. Jennings might sit in the kitchen while the women washed the dishes. Jennings waxed even more content under this treatment. He did not stay late, however, explaining that when it came to sitting up nights for sparking, he wasn't in it with the city dudes who didn't have to start harrowing at daybreak. Melissa was sent out to the shed to hold the lantern for him while he harnessed.

When the wheels rattled down the road, she returned to the house. Mrs. Dawes was setting her bread to rise in the kitchen. Melissa tried to say good night from the doorway.

"Step inside and shut that door. Don't you see how that draft is making this lamp smoke its chimney?"

The daughter came over and sat down by the table. Mrs. Dawes continued:

"When I first set my eyes on you in that ridic'ulous dress this afternoon, I said to myself you had cooked your goose sure, for he'd see with half an eye you wasn't fitted to be a farmer's wife. But I had miscalculated on what fools men be, for I seen in a minute he was plumb taken up with it—sort of mesmerized. I'll warrant he was making fancy pictures to himself of you trailing round his kitchen poking down the clothes in the wash boiler with that dress on. That's the one time you

showed yourself smarter than your ma."

Melissa smiled somewhat wearily.

"I must say," her mother went on, "that you've been a deal more chirky ever since that visit to Mary and Jed, though not so contented alongside of me nor always so agreeable as you used to be. As for Jennings, I've noticed him looking at you in church lately, so I was thinking perhaps I could toll him over."

"Mother!" protested Melissa.

"I'm right well pleased that the other girls won't be putting it over you much longer on account of nobody choosing you. And I'll deed the farm to you on your wedding day—not to him and you, for men are queer critters and I want you to hold the whip hand and keep him in his place."

"Mother, you really *do* love me!" exclaimed Melissa, kissing her good night—an unusual demonstration.

"Melissy, you're ruining them flowers off your hat. You've taken a month's wear out of them this afternoon. When you go upstairs, you put them right back where they belong."

Melissa smiled a wry little smile as she unpinned the pansies before the mirror in her room. She did not, however, restore them to the hatbox.

CHAPTER IX.

Jennings' Thursday afternoon visit, including staying to supper, became a regular weekly practice. Melissa always appeared in her pansy gown, provokingly gracious and at her ease. Each succeeding Thursday Jennings came with the full and self-avowed intention of proposing, and each time he drove away after supper with the proposal undelivered.

The result of this continued bafflement was to make his suit more ardent from week to week. Higher and higher each time mounted his resolve to pre-



She extended her hand easily to Jennings, who undoubted himself awkwardly from the low easy-chair. "Howdy-do, Miss Melissa."

cipitate the crisis. Even though he was not a man particularly sensitive to spiritual states or mental barriers, Melissa's tactics had thus far been effectual. Yet she perceived that each week he came armed with a larger and larger cudgel of determination, so that the Thursday was bound to arrive when he would beat down her defenses.

Meanwhile, every occasion that she

was able to stand him off meant another week of blessed reprieve for her life in the barn. For when it should come to the final cornering, Melissa had not the least doubt that she was going to accept Jennings and make the best of him. Naturally this would end all dramatic studies. The barn on the farm was full of hay and horses. And as a farmer's wife, her days would be oc-

cupied with the house and dairy, with raising chickens and cooking for harvest hands. And the grenadier eye of her mother would be over everything, to reproach her if any iota of duty was neglected.

She often wondered what Mr. Flemming would say when he came back and found her engaged to a farmer. The Whistleville crust would then close over her for good. Well, why not? She would never so far brave her mother as to take her life into her own hands and go on the stage, even if she should prove to have the talent, and there was little enough likelihood of that.

Thus brooding the situation, she grew to dread Mr. Flemming's coming, while longing for it infinitely. The nature of this longing she never allowed herself to analyze. He was in all probability a married man, and even if this were not the case, there could be no other significance to his connection with her than the chance pitying kindness of a gifted man of the world to an untaught village woman. Perhaps it was an incident so trifling that he might even forget the promised visit, or at least compromise with a letter saying that he could not make it convenient. Probably he had a dozen Melissas studying in barns all over the country. No, there was no reason connected with Samuel Flemming for not accepting Peter Jennings.

On this climacteric Thursday Melissa had assumed her pansy gown in preparation for her summons to the house, but was lingering at the barn until the last possible moment. Over the gown she had donned a huge Elizabethan ruff and scarlet cloak. She was rehearsing the rôle of the daintily vixenish sister of King Henry VIII in "When Knighthood Was in Flower." Back and forth the whole length of the platform she stormed and scolded.

As had happened once before, a man's shadow was projected inside the western doorway. She started, and invol-

untarily both hands came up over her heart. The sun of early afternoon printed the image, grotesque, dwarfed, unrecognizable. Flemming, of course! It was time for him to come, and this had been her dream—that he should find her practicing at her post. For days she had not costumed or walked the boards without this instant expectation. If it were a favorite part, she would linger over it in hope; if one she felt less sure of, she would hasten through it quickly in dread of his shadow in the door. She enjoyed impersonating the blunt, adorable, high-tempered princess, and considered the moment propitious for the appearance of the actor. Jennings was forgotten. With tremulous gayety she called out:

"What knight are you whose shadow haunts my door? Enter if your heart be bold!"

The telescoped shadow moved forward the short distance necessary to bring into view its owner—Jennings!

"You!" Melissa cried flatly, and dropped limply on the chopping block.

"Your ma said I would find you out here," he explained. "Say, wasn't you expecting it was me when you hollered out that play stuff?"

"No, Mr. Jennings, I was not!"

"Have you got another beau who comes out here to spark you?" he demanded belligerently.

"I have not!" she affirmed, with spirit.

"That's all right, then," he answered, appeased. "I thought I'd never heard of any one else shining up to you before I got the notion."

Melissa's eyes snapped in a way that would have done credit to the Tudor princess.

"You're the first man who ever came to see me regularly."

"I thought as much," he answered, with relieved complacency; "though I must say"—here his tone took on complaint—"that you're standoffish enough to have been followed by a hundred

fellers, all dying to pick up your handkercher."

"It's supposed," she retorted, "that a man sets more value on a woman he has to run after real hard."

"By jingo, you're right! I ain't denying but what my appetite for you has got an awful whetting from the way you've used me, but say, now—ain't it about time——"

"How did mother happen to send you over here?"

"Oh, she was saying that you spend most of your time here practicing pieces. My, but them outlandish duds do set you up! Queer I never used to think you was pretty! Now to-day it's got to come off. Say, will you——"

"Run over some of my parts for you? Certainly. It will be a pleasure."

To herself she wondered if she could possibly keep going until her mother should mercifully call them in to supper. She tripped down the stage as *Babbie*; she gloomed across it as *Lady Macbeth*.

"Say, your husband wouldn't ever have to go to the circus. He'd be amused plenty right at home and save his quarter."

Melissa paid no heed, but vanished into the harness room, emerging this time as *Dora*, the child wife, in flowered chintz and white fichu. That rôle was unfortunate and proved her undoing, for it roused Jennings to fresh consciousness of his original errand and intent.

"Now you're talking the right stuff!" he approved. "Say, I want you should come live at my house and speak that piece to me right along."

The chopping block had been moved out into the burdocks to serve him as a seat. He now came forward to the platform. He was really very much in earnest, yet not too much so for a self-congratulatory sense that he was managing the proposal in a way that was remarkably neat. He stood just in front of

Melissa, holding out his arms for her to drop into them.

"I want a *Dora*," he pleaded.

She stopped and drew back, laughing uneasily.

"You don't want a *Dora*," she fended. "What use would a *Dora* be to you on the farm? She'd be scared to feed the cow when you went to town. She couldn't churn—it would tire her little arms. She'd always burn your bacon, and she'd cry because she pricked her fingers darning your socks. You'd be good and tired of poor little *Dora* in a week."

His arms had dropped awkwardly.

"You've sure got a strong case against *Dora*, though I still think she'd be mighty cunning when she come running to meet a feller just getting home from town. Well, let's grant that I don't want a *Dora*. Let's say I want a *Melissa*." Again he held out his arms. "Won't you be my *Melissa*?"

Again she drew back.

"No, I can't be your *Melissa*!" she cried, almost as unexpectedly to herself as to him. Once more his arms dropped, this time so laxly that they rebounded from his body. His jaw also relaxed.

"Don't you—don't—don't you want—to marry me?" he stammered, too amazed and crestfallen to take pains to shape the query more gallantly. "I ain't no bad habits, and I'd be good to a woman, and I like you awful well."

"Yes, you would be good to a wife," she answered, more kindly, "and you don't deserve that any woman should play you the mean trick of marrying you without loving you. That's what I would be doing and what I came pretty near doing. Sit down and let's talk." She motioned to the edge of the platform and seated herself there also, but out of touching distance.

"I'm all flabbergasted!" he weakly confessed. "Ain't there no hope you could get to care?"

"No! No! It would be just shoving

over a bit, still under the Whistleville crust, and I'm dead tired of that crust, and it's come to be heavy, heavy on top of me! I want to see and move and think! I want to live! Why, I've lived more right here in this barn the last two months than in all my life before!"

"But, Melissa," he expostulated, "I've known you for going on three years and I never realized you had these wild feelings ranting round inside you. I always took you for one of the meek sort."

"How long, Mr. Jennings, have you been thinking about me—this way?"

"Ever since the night you spoke that 'Curfew' piece at the sociable. There was a shiny kind of something about you I'd never noticed before."

"That's just when I began to flutter about under the crust. You could have had me before that and I would have been so downright thankful to you for beckoning me out of the wallflower row that I'd have imagined I was in love with you, and I'd have been so eager I would have said 'yes' almost before you asked me."

"I dunno why, but I didn't——"

"That's just it! You never looked at me then. That Melissa would have been a good wife to you, but you never wanted me until I changed to this new Melissa who wouldn't be any use to you even if you could have her."

"Are you sure and certain I can't have her?"

"Yes, Mr. Jennings. I'm sorry, but there's no use speaking about it any more."

He tugged uncomfortably at his shirt collar.

"Then I might as well hitch up and drive home. You make my excuses to your ma about supper."

"I will, and I'm sorry you won't stay."

"Good-by, Melissa."

"Good-by."

He was gone. Melissa went into the

harness room and stood before the mirror, staring at the woman who had just refused Mr. Peter Jennings. Then she looked about at the stage finery and the armful of books. Was it for such dream stuff that she had foregone the plump little certainties of an engagement and a wedding? Yes! Yes! She picked up Stephen Phillips' "Sin of David," and tried some of its mellow, somber lines. But soon she flung it by. Mr. Jennings would be gone by this, and she might as well go home and have it out with her mother.

The dust of Jennings' wheels was a far cloud on the road. Melissa did not have to make his excuses, however, as her mother had evidently come out to propound her own inquiries. She now sat, grimly patient, on the woodshed steps, her arms wrapped in her apron, awaiting her daughter's approach.

"How'd you come to treat a good man like that?" she demanded, without prefaces.

"Because he asked me in the barn, where I know my own soul. If it had been in the house, I suppose I would have accepted him."

"I sent him along out there because I reckoned that, being more used to barns than to houses, it would be easier for him to deliver himself."

"He's gone, mother. Do let me alone about him, please."

"Yes, he's gone, and he won't be back, nuther. He's a man you got to take when he's offered you. He's in real earnest about getting married, which is the only kind that's any account, but that sort can't be fooled with. Since it ain't to be you, it will be some other girl so quick as to make your head swim. You're such a blame' little idiot that I ain't going to even try to toll him back."

"That will save me the trouble of refusing him again," Melissa answered, with a deep sigh of relief.

CHAPTER X.

Samuel Flemming returned to Whistleville on a July morning. He discovered Melissa in the back yard, hanging out the white clothes while her mother was finishing the laundering of the colored garments in the kitchen. It was a fortunate circumstance that Melissa had already strung a line of sheets between herself and the house and a line of towels between herself and the neighbors. She wore her black-and-white morning calico, but it was turned in at the neck so that it displayed her full white throat, and her bronze hair was most bewitchingly slipping from its heavy coil.

"The maid was in the garden hanging out the clothes," the actor called.

"Mr. Flemming!" Her dismay sputtered out of her. "You were to find me in the barn doing *Lady Teazle* or *Portia*. You didn't wait for your cue!"

He laughed heartily. "Shall I back off and reënter? Listen, Melissa Dawes, I didn't look for you at the barn, because what I have to say first doesn't belong to the barn. You're the hauntingest piece of womanhood I have ever come across in all my wandering life. Why, when I turned myself loose about you to my playwright friend, I stirred him up to write me the biggest play he's ever done. And the name of it is 'Melissa Dawes,' same as you."

"Oh, wonderful! Is there a small part in it for me?"

"You shall be leading lady—Melissa Dawes herself—if you want to and have it in you."

"Oh! Oh! Do you feel any hope that I can be a leading lady?"

"I don't know how far you've progressed in art—though there's a new liveness about you that promises well—but I'm not caring too much. There's another rôle I have in mind for you, Melissa Dawes."

His tone brought the color to her face.

"Another rôle—in this same play? I would be contented——"

"Wait for your turn, little one. Let me finish my speech first. I'm forty-six—that's some old for you; but mine is a profession in which men stay young for their age. You haven't seen anything but Whistleville—perhaps it would be taking unfair advantage to try to tie you up without giving you a chance to see more of life. "But, Melissa—Melissa Dawes, I love you!"

She breathed quickly, but did not speak.

"It's your cue now," he prompted gently.

"I mustn't come to you unless I could bring you something in your work. I ought not to let you tote me round with the baggage—just a burden——"

"But, Melissa Dawes, darling, I'm wanting you first, most, worst, and all the time in the rôle of wife. Doesn't the part please you, Melissa Dawes dear?"

"It's a beautiful part, but——"

"'But me no buts!'" he responded joyfully. "I love you, Melissa Dawes! I love you, my little whitebird baked in a pie!"

"When the pie was opened, the bird began to sing," she quoted back, frankly yielding him her hands across the clothes basket.

The next instant she snatched them away.

"What will mother——"

"All she stipulates for is a funeral or a wedding. That's easy! Why, we'll have her trained yet to root for us on the front row at our play."

Samuel Flemming masterfully lifted away the clothes basket from between them.

"That 'prop' is out of place," he observed.

Then it was that the providential disposal of the sheets and towels became apparent.

ON THE LIMIT

By Edwin L. Sabin

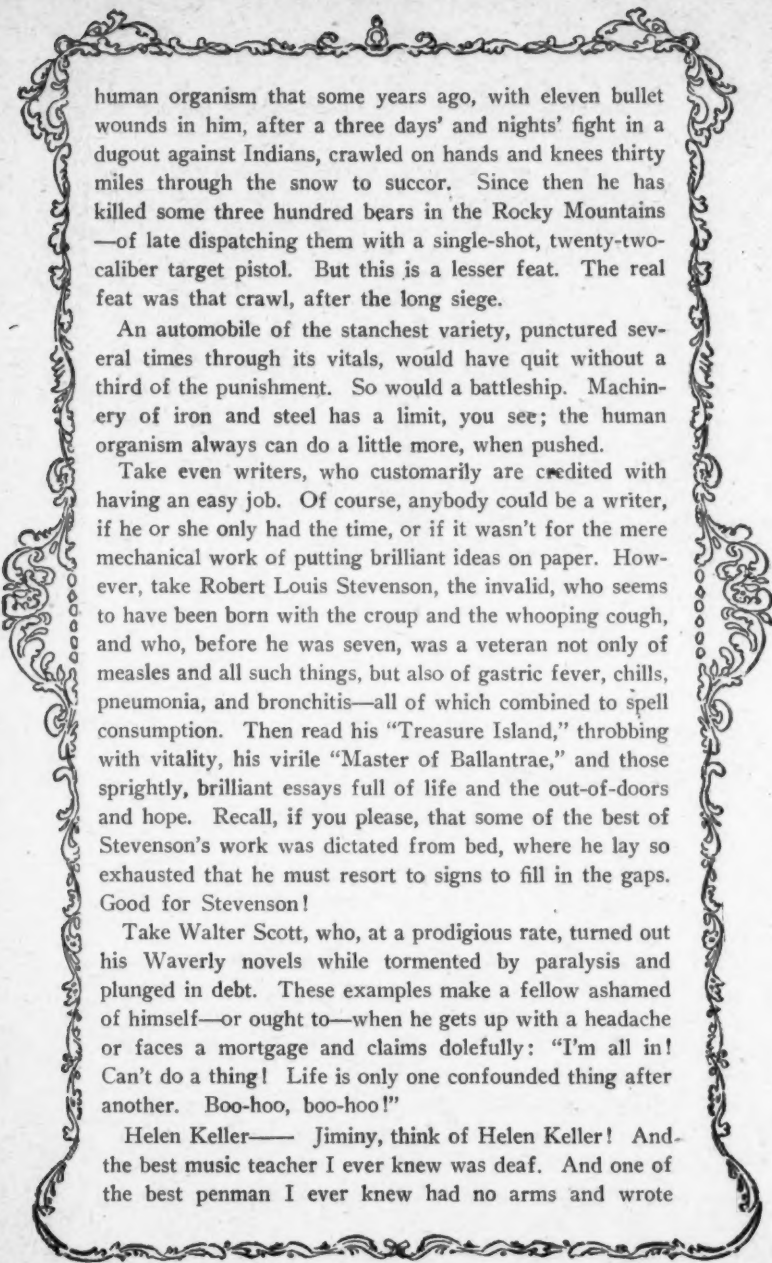
THE human organism is a great piece of machinery.

It is ahead of the strongest and most complex of other machines, because it has a mind and a heart as a reserve power. There's the automobile, for instance. When any thoughtful person considers the automobile, he cannot help but be struck with wonder at the abuse it stands. The engine seems to be such a small part of it; but day after day—and usually night after night—it pelts along, battered by chuckholes and sharp corners, pumping up long grades, racked by careless gear shifting, under-lubricated, exposed to mud and rain and heat and cold, forced to make three cylinders do the work of four, and generally manhandled and womanhandled until one wonders that it runs at all. But it does run, by the hundred thousand, far exceeding the manufacturer's guarantee. However, man can beat it.

There's the trip hammer, and the steam shovel, and the linotype, and the nail machine, and the sewing machine, and the bottle labeler, and the battleship with its one hundred and more engines contained in the one hull. Modern machinery is such a marvel that, were we not accustomed to it, we would constantly stand with mouths agape. But the mere act of putting one foot before another or picking up a pin in the fingers is a greater marvel.

The automobile, with its small, simple gas engine that will take a load of thirty-five hundred and more pounds up a twenty-per-cent grade, or plow through hub-deep mud with it, excites, as said, my profound admiration—and yet the other day I met a bit of human organism that can beat it a mile.

He was a slight little man, with a limp and a bad cough, and he didn't appear to amount to a hill of beans. Why, to compare him with a big, shiny, snorting, sixty-horse-power touring car, or with a battleship, would seem an insult to the party of the second part. But here was a



human organism that some years ago, with eleven bullet wounds in him, after a three days' and nights' fight in a dugout against Indians, crawled on hands and knees thirty miles through the snow to succor. Since then he has killed some three hundred bears in the Rocky Mountains—of late dispatching them with a single-shot, twenty-two-caliber target pistol. But this is a lesser feat. The real feat was that crawl, after the long siege.

An automobile of the stanchest variety, punctured several times through its vitals, would have quit without a third of the punishment. So would a battleship. Machinery of iron and steel has a limit, you see; the human organism always can do a little more, when pushed.

Take even writers, who customarily are credited with having an easy job. Of course, anybody could be a writer, if he or she only had the time, or if it wasn't for the mere mechanical work of putting brilliant ideas on paper. However, take Robert Louis Stevenson, the invalid, who seems to have been born with the croup and the whooping cough, and who, before he was seven, was a veteran not only of measles and all such things, but also of gastric fever, chills, pneumonia, and bronchitis—all of which combined to spell consumption. Then read his "Treasure Island," throbbing with vitality, his virile "Master of Ballantrae," and those sprightly, brilliant essays full of life and the out-of-doors and hope. Recall, if you please, that some of the best of Stevenson's work was dictated from bed, where he lay so exhausted that he must resort to signs to fill in the gaps. Good for Stevenson!

Take Walter Scott, who, at a prodigious rate, turned out his Waverly novels while tormented by paralysis and plunged in debt. These examples make a fellow ashamed of himself—or ought to—when he gets up with a headache or faces a mortgage and claims dolefully: "I'm all in! Can't do a thing! Life is only one confounded thing after another. Boo-hoo, boo-hoo!"

Helen Keller—— Jiminy, think of Helen Keller! And the best music teacher I ever knew was deaf. And one of the best penman I ever knew had no arms and wrote

with his toes. And—— But, shucks, what's the use of rubbing it in?

The fact crops out that the human organism really has no limit to its strength and endurance under stress. The harder it is tried, the more it can do. Few people are so sick that they cannot be a little sicker, and few people are so poor that they cannot be a little poorer—and still keep going. Oftentimes we can look back and marvel that we have endured so much and have come out with flying colors, after all. I confess it is pretty bad to have a bilious attack; the misery of a bilious attack—when everything looks and tastes yellow, and we don't know what ails us, but are certain that it is something fatal—seems the limit of human endurance. But, after weathering appendicitis, a mere bilious attack is only the pastime of a rainy day. And even appendicitis might be worse!

The human organism is much like a crab. When the crab loses a claw—which, if you ever have watched a crab feeding, you will know is very useful to him—he doesn't repine or decide to starve to death; he grows another. And man, rebuffed and wet-blanketed, and apparently put down and out, pretty generally bobs up, if he only keeps at it. He comes the nearest to having an un-stallable self-starter of any machine on the market.

Where there is one person discouraged by the headache or by the loss of a few thousand dollars or by other poor cards drawn, there are ten, I don't doubt, who are forging along, tireless, and in their astonishing reserve powers outdoing the widow's cruse or the miracle of the loaves and fishes. After casting about, and seeing what actually is being accomplished by this wonderful human organism, how any person who has one of his five sense left can consider himself fit for only the scrap heap is past understanding.

Six or eight hours of sleep is accepted as the proper dose for ordinary health, isn't it? But didn't you ever do with less, and did it kill you or even cripple you? Pshaw, I've been five days and nights without sleep, myself, and sea


captains have kept the bridge for a week and more. We fast, and go thirsty, and crawl thirty miles through snow, and suffer headaches, stomachaches, and appendicitis, and from luxury are plunged into poverty, and from companionship are plunged into bereavement, and lose arms, legs, eyes, and ears; habits are broken, rules are violated, by all accounts we should be as dead as doornails—whatever those are—but we aren't. We've almost always got one more punch.

The limit of this human organism is a very elusive figure. I don't know of any greater fascination than to impose the limit—and then exceed it a bit, just for fun. A fellow can sit down to eight hours' work, and by fooling time a little—say, by making the clock run slow or his mind run fast—can slip in ten hours without his organism being any the wiser or the "worsen." Limit is a different thing from limitation; the original limitation was eight hours, whereas the limit wasn't reached in ten. See?


The reserve power of this human organism actually seems to increase by use; all it needs is encouragement—and that is one of the "sweet uses" of adversity. However, of course we aren't all alike in our methods of engineering at the throttle.

No limit to the human organism? Huh! Suppose we figure on that. The heart beats sixty times a minute, and there are sixty minutes in the hour, and twenty-four hours in the day, and three hundred and sixty-five—and sometimes three hundred and sixty-six—days in the year, and if I've lived forty years, how often has my heart beat? Great Scott, send for the doctor and the notary! I certainly am at the limit, or ought to be—instead of fit for living forty years more. And how I've written an article of two thousand words, averaging five letters each—not including letters erased—and every letter struck once—not including letters missed and struck twice—is perfectly appalling when one considers it.

Yes, I, and you perhaps, ought to be all in, but—we're not; and that is the best answer.



AT THE END OF THE VOYAGE



BY JULIET G. SAGER

ILLUSTRATED BY R. VAN BUREN

A HEARTLIKE throbbing that deepened and steadied, a shiver that settled into regular vibrations like the play of muscles in a swimmer's body, and the great ocean liner waked into life. Bells clanged, chains rattled, a hundred new sounds and movements mingled, and a strip of sparkling water appeared between the deck and the pier, widening inexorably. A second's hush fell on the crowds that banked the pier and on the rows along the railing of the decks—the involuntary tribute of man, the land animal, to the mystery and majesty of the sea, into whose silences these few were venturing. Then the gay clamor of farewells and jests and final messages rose again, with a fluttering of handkerchiefs and a waving of hats.

The elder of two women standing on an upper deck, somewhat apart from the others, pressed timorously against her companion's arm.

"Oh, Enid!" she murmured. "I feel exactly as if we were letting go of all we'd ever known, and dropping off the edge of the world!"

The other woman, gripping the rail with rather shabbily gloved hands, bit her lips in vain. The thing she was trying to repress was too strong for her.

"We shouldn't have come, mother! I'm sorry we came!" The words sprang out.

"Enid!"

"I've been crazy, I think! Why, I don't know him. He's a stranger—a total stranger! And I'm on my way to——"

The older woman shot her a glance of dismay and bewilderment. "Channing Morse a stranger? You grew up together!"

"I haven't seen him for eleven years. He was a boy then. Now he's a man—a man I may not even recognize when we meet!"

"But you've been corresponding off and on all the while."

"What are letters? Mother, till this minute he has never seemed real to me. I was tired of teaching school and living in a small town. I wanted to travel, to see the places he wrote about. I didn't think about him or what it—*it* meant. But now all at once I do, and I——"

"Hush, Enid! Folks will notice. There's a man staring at you now."

This time the daughter compelled her lips to obedience, and stood gazing silently out across the waters, though she saw nothing of the magnificent harbor sights. The strengthening breeze loosened curly tendrils of her hair and whipped them girlishly about her face, but there was no youth in her expression; and slim and graceful as her figure was, she had a quaint primness of bearing like that of the old-fashioned woman of forty.

"Good-looking woman," a passer-by observed casually. But the man with him shook his head.

"Looks starved—as if she hadn't got what she needed from life—fun, maybe, or friends or frivolous clothes!"

"Cold, mother?"

Mrs. Norton nodded, blue-nosed, for



Enid stiffened into her sternest schoolroom manner. "You are making a mistake," she said.

the breeze had grown into a steady wind, chill and salt as the miles of water it had crossed.

"Poor mother! And you're tired, too. We'll go down to our stateroom and you shall have a cup of tea."

"Oh, that would be nice!" But as they turned, Mrs. Norton gave a gasp of alarm. "That man—he's been watch-

ing us, and now I do believe he's going to speak!"

And certainly he was coming toward them, a tall, well-set-up individual, with a much-tanned face, a foreign-looking little beard, and an air of always having his own way.

"How do you do?" he said, smiling. There was a queer, only half-repressed

elation, in his voice, and he was actually holding out his hand!

They were the hand and voice of a gentleman. Aside from his impulsiveness, there seemed nothing really incriminating about him—unless it was that un-American beard. But Enid stiffened into her sternest schoolroom manner.

"You are making a mistake."

"What!" he exclaimed; and behind his eyeglasses his eyes began to dance. "You don't mean——"

"Come, mother dear."

"One moment!" he persisted. "I assure you the mistake isn't being made by me. If——"

Ignoring him, she stalked past, her head high and her cheeks pink. He made a quick movement to follow, but "What a very stupid, annoying person!" came back to him with stinging distinctness, and halted him very effectually.

"Though perhaps he really did think he knew us," she admitted later, in the safety of their stateroom. It was improper, disgraceful—but after the shock had come a furtive sense of exhilaration.

But her mother's shy, country-bred soul was quaking. "Such a thing never happened to me before in all my life!" she kept mourning.

"Nor to me, mother."

"And he seemed like a gentleman, too! He was real nice looking, wasn't he?"

"Perhaps he didn't mean to be rude. You know we've always heard that people speak without introductions on shipboard."

"Enid! Rush right up and try to shake hands, as he did?"

"N-no. Perhaps not. But if he thought he knew us——" Enid's lips would persist in curling up at the corners. "Or wanted to so badly——" some new-born imp in her was whispering.

"Well, I wish Channing had been

there. That's what I wish!" Mrs. Norton said significantly. "I rather guess that—— What's the matter, dear?"

"I thought I heard the stewardess." Enid closed the door she had sprung up to open, and seized zealously on their suit case. "We'd better begin to settle, hadn't we? You tell me where you want your things, and——"

Her energy was commendable, if sudden, and she talked cheerfully and constantly. But it struck her mother that she looked pale.

"Don't fuss so. You're tired, dear," she said once; and again, uneasily: "You didn't mean what you said up on the deck, did you, Enid? About being sorry we'd come?"

Enid winced. "I don't know, mother. Truly I don't. For a minute I wanted to jump overboard, but——"

"Of course. Of course." Astonishingly her mother beamed. "All girls feel like that. I remember the day before I——"

"Oh, let's not talk about it!" Enid interrupted hastily. "We can't turn back now, anyway. And when we get to Liverpool—— But we won't look ahead. We'll just enjoy this trip, eh, dear? Think! It's the Atlantic Ocean rocking us so carefully, and we're on our way to Europe—you and I! What we've always dreamed of! And here comes your tea."

At dinner time, Mrs. Norton was in her berth, not exactly sick, but dizzy and disinclined to move.

"Have something to eat down here, Enid," she urged. "You can't go alone into that big dining room—or whatever they call it."

"Oh, yes, I can!" Enid laughed, all the more valiant on the surface because underneath she was a-shiver with bashfulness.

"But that awful man—what if you meet him?"

"I can take care of myself, as I fancy I've taught him!"

And though her knees felt rather weak under her, she sallied forth in her prim little dress and her primmest schoolmistress manner.

An hour later, she came back, outwardly the same, and yet with a look about her that made her mother open her drowsy eyes.

"Enid, you haven't been out in that wind again?"

"No, dear," she answered—quite truthfully, for it was only the wind of romance and adventure that had blown across her, stirring the stiff, tight little leaves of her nature.

"The dinner? Oh, very nice, indeed!" Dutifully she described it from soup to coffee, and the crowd of diners of every sort, and all her small experiences. Then, at the very last, as if she had just remembered: "And what do you think, mother? That gentleman who spoke to us this afternoon sits at our table. He apologized over and over. It was all a mistake."

"Enid Norton! You didn't let him talk to you?" Her mother lifted her head in horror.

"Everybody talks to everybody else. It was perfectly proper!" Enid laughed and pushed her gently back on the pillow. "Lie down, dear, before your head begins to ache. Truly he was very courteous and sorry he had worried us. He asked me particularly to explain to you."

"Well, of course, if it was a mistake——" Mrs. Norton sank back again, mollified. "But a girl in your position has got to be so careful!"

No answer to that. She closed her eyes, opened them again. "I know now whom he makes me think of! That architect who built the new courthouse!"

"Oh, Mr. Ward is much better looking. Though he does remind me of somebody, too." Enid's voice sounded

as if she might be smiling to herself, and she added irrelevantly: "That is his name—Ward. He's an American, but his business keeps him abroad most of the time."

There was more she might have told—the quick pleasure in his eyes when she appeared, the all-but-caressing note in his voice when he spoke to her, the delicately reassuring way in which he had set her at ease with her surroundings. But they were intangible things—perhaps imaginary!—and, put into words, would sound all wrong. So she sat and smiled over them in the half darkness, and presently her mother went soundly asleep.

Only nine o'clock of her first evening on the ocean, and a full moon, at that! Flesh and blood, still under thirty, could not go sedately to bed! Wrapping herself in her heavy cape, she slipped out, up onto the deck, and into her chair, luckily placed in a quiet, rather shadowy spot.

Somewhere an orchestra was playing, people sauntered past laughing and chatting, and before her—just as she had always pictured it—hung a great, golden moon at the end of its own silver path. Best of all, America and the drab, plodding past were safely sunk below the horizon, and Europe and the uncertain future would not rise above it for six blessed days! Everything, herself included, seemed a little unreal, and she was content, blissfully, irresponsibly content, that it should be so.

Ward's coming troubled her at first, though clearly he had not come on her account. Twice he strolled by, eyes straight ahead, looking big and formidable in his heavy ulster; and, shrinking shyly back into the shadow, she was grateful that he had not seen her. But the third time he paused, tossed his cigar over the rail, and dropped lazily into the chair next hers. She sat as still as a mouse, wondering what she ought to do. Speak? Or slip quietly away?



She sat as still as a mouse, wondering what she ought to do. Speak? Or slip quietly away?

"Miss Norton?" He was looking at her now. "Are we neighbors on deck, too? What luck!"

"A beautiful night, isn't it?" she murmured inanely.

"It's perfect—now." There was teasing laughter in his voice, which was intimate to the point of affection.

She flushed painfully—as she was to flush often at remarks of his. "It's cold, though. I—I was just going in," she faltered.

"The moment I come? I'll think you're running away from me!"

Again her self-distrustful dread of saying or doing the wrong thing put her at a disadvantage. She hesitated, feeling wretchedly awkward and unsophisticated—and was lost.

"How did you find your mother feeling after dinner?" he asked. And when she had told him: "You're a good sailor yourself, I hope?"

"I don't know yet," she had to admit,

and then to explain that this was her first voyage; which opened up a serviceable topic that led to another that led to still another, till she was enmeshed beyond her power of extricating herself.

Perhaps she did not try very hard. Certainly she did not try long. It was years since she had sat watching a summer moon with a man so obviously bent on detaining and interesting her, and never with such a man—so traveled, so worldly-wise, and yet so tactfully oblivious of her limitations that he seemed to lift her above them. The wine of it went to her head gradually. She lost her shyness and found her tongue, and a gay, frivolous tongue it proved, wagging easily, too.

"I talked to him as if I had known him all my life! I *felt* as if I had!" she reflected afterward, amazed.

"To-morrow we'll go over the boat on a sight-seeing tour, eh? Directly after breakfast?" he said, when she could be persuaded to stay on deck no longer; and if she did not consent, neither did she refuse outright.

Sleep came to her late that night. The throbbing of the engines, the sound of the waves, the queer, salty smells, the sense of great energies working on sleeplessly through the silence and dark—these things, so hackneyed to the callous globe-trotter, were all new and wonderful to her. Her brain was teeming; the events of the day made themselves into endless moving pictures against her closed eyelids. Yet, illogically enough, it was Ward she thought about most, and with the keenest interest and anticipation.

"Does he really like me as much as he seems to?" she wondered, a smile that had no business there curving her lips. "But he takes too much for granted. I shall *not* go sight-seeing with him to-morrow. At least, not directly after breakfast."

But she did. After luncheon, too, and again in the evening under a moon

whose magic path seemed broader and brighter than ever. She had two good excuses: First, that she was lonely, for her mother still refused to leave her berth; and second, that there was no way short of rudeness by which to avoid him. Wherever she was, there was he, with no apparent object in life but to provide her with comforts and entertainment. Moreover, he had amended his manners, and though sometimes his voice turned too caressing or his eyes took on the look that startled her, as a rule he was discretion itself.

The next day was like unto that, and the next and the next. They walked together, they ate together, they sat side by side in their deck chairs, talking or reading. To Enid, tasting a man's devotion for the first time, they were wonder days. She moved in a sort of golden dream, and though she had her disturbed moments, when she wondered how much it all meant, and how it would end, she would not allow herself to be awakened completely.

"How pink your cheeks are!" her mother observed once. "I declare, you look like a young girl again! What's come over you, Enid?"

"It's the air, I suppose. It's very bracing, they say," Enid answered demurely.

But Mrs. Norton had been a girl herself, and had not forgotten it. A vague misgiving seized upon her, connected rather definitely with the name "Ward" she had been hearing so frequently of late. Surely Enid could not be so foolish as to— Even in her mind she did not finish the sentence, but the next day she lifted her protesting head from its pillows and dragged herself up on deck to make a few personal observations. Naturally there was not so much to see as usual—one cannot leave one's mother sitting alone among strangers—but she saw enough to make her very sober.

"Aren't you seeing a good deal of that Mr. Ward?" she hinted that night.

Enid was braiding her hair with great assiduity. "Well, his chair is next ours," she said, not looking around. "And he's very agreeable. You liked him, didn't you?"

"I did. But what about Channing? What would he think of your being such friends?"

Sheer pity for her mother's disappointment made Enid swallow the reply on the tip of her tongue.

"In less than thirty-six hours we'll be in Liverpool, Enid dear. You aren't forgetting that?"

"No," Enid said wearily. "No, mother, I'm not forgetting."

And if she had been, she made up for it before daylight, when sleep came at last. Thirty-six hours! How cruelly short the time seemed, computed so! And at the end of it—what? Alternately she was warm with trust and hope, and shivering with dread.

Mrs. Norton—careful mother!—rose for breakfast and heroically spent the entire day on deck. Ward adapted himself to the new triangular situation cheerfully, evincing not the slightest impatience, but Enid, loyal daughter though she was, fretted internally as she counted the precious hours slipping away barrenly. But, providentially, with night came a chilly rain and symptoms of neuralgia the most resolute of chaperons could not withstand. Ward's eyes sent Enid a message as she escorted her mother below, and presently, in reply, she appeared again, alone.

"I—I forgot my rug," she explained, with a queer touch of her first shyness; but he only laughed and tucked her arm under his in the possessive way she half liked, half resented.

"Let's walk a bit."

So up and down they paced, the deserted deck wet and slippery under their feet, the mist driving into their faces. He was in high spirits, she nervously anxious to seem so, yet the talk did not run as easily as usual. But there was

nothing significant in it—not a hint that the next day would see the end of their companionship. A humiliating sense of the futility of it gained momentarily on Enid.

"A flirtation—that's all it has been to him!" she thought, aflame with self-contempt. "What am I waiting for? He has nothing to say!"

But when she tried to say good night and leave him, his mood seemed to change.

"Oh, not yet! It's very early," he urged, and when she positively refused to keep on walking, drew her with gentle force to the rail. "I can't let you go yet. Don't you know that this is our last night?"

There was no sea, no sky—only a vague, heaving grayness beneath that ran away into a paler grayness beyond and above. There was a minute of silence between them as listless on the surface, but with much the same heavy surge underneath.

"And to-morrow, standing here, we shall see England!" He laughed under his breath, and suddenly his warm hand closed over hers, that was chilled and trembling. "It's been a wonderful voyage, hasn't it?"

She nodded. Without looking up, she knew how his eyes were glowing down at her, and his big, protecting figure leaning over her.

"I shall never forget it," he went on, his voice a murmur close to her ear. "And yet—I shall be glad when it is ended. Can you guess why?"

"A hundred reasons, perhaps!" She spoke lightly, but instinctively braced herself.

"Only one—the girl I'm to marry. She will be in Liverpool to-morrow."

"Indeed! I congratulate you, I'm sure!" The words came with a cool, sweet composure that amazed Enid herself.

"Thank you. Thank you very much." He laughed again—mockingly, she



P. Van Buren —

"Oh!" She drew back, her cheeks flaming. "You're very sure whom I meant!
How do you know?"

fancied—and taking a card from his case, put it into her hand. "There is my London address. Now if you will give me yours—"

"We're not going to London. In fact, we're going home by the next boat."

"Going home! But I understood you had come over for an indefinite stay!"

"That was the original plan. But before we were out of the harbor, I had changed my mind."

"Yet only this afternoon your mother was saying—" Clearly he was bewildered, and far more concerned than he had any business to be.

"I haven't talked it over with her yet. But it is settled—oh, decidedly!" In spite of herself, her voice had grown strained, but she forced herself to smile up at him. "Now I really must go down to her. Good night."

"Just a minute!" He would not let her pass. "Tell me why you have changed your mind. Has anything—er—happened?"

"What could? Oh, dear, no! It changed of itself, I suppose!" With a quick movement, she slipped by him and succeeded in making her escape.

"Enid, wait! Enid!" he exclaimed, but she scurried on, tossing him a gay, if rather shaky, laugh over her shoulder.

It seemed miles to her stateroom, miles she must walk calmly, if a remnant of self-respect were to be left her. But at last she was there, and, by Heaven's own mercy, her mother was asleep and did not waken. Ward's card was still in her hand, a crumpled wad. Without glancing at it, she tore it savagely into bits and flung it into a corner. Then, undressing somehow, she crept into the blessed haven of her berth.

Mrs. Norton was on deck bright and early the next morning, gloating over the first sight of land, but the docks were within stone's throw before Enid found courage to join her. Nobody but herself could know how she dreaded

the day, what terrified forebodings were in her mind.

But the first thing she saw was Ward standing in friendliest converse with her mother. He greeted her exactly as always, neither avoiding her nor seeking an opportunity to resume their talk of the night before. Apparently he considered it of no importance whatever.

The second shock was the failure of Channing Morse to appear. Though they waited—Ward waiting with them as a matter of course!—till the crowds had scattered and no possibility remained that they had missed each other, no Channing came.

"He's been delayed in some way. That's all," Ward reassured them cheerfully. "He'll turn up soon. You'd better let me take you to a hotel where you can wait comfortably."

"I believe we had better. If you will be so kind," Mrs. Norton consented promptly and with surprising composure. As for Enid, she was ready to go anywhere, do anything, to postpone the meeting.

And so the preposterous thing came to pass that presently they were driving in a cab Ward had called to a hotel he had chosen, and then ascending solemnly in an English lift to the rooms he had secured for them, while below he stood smiling encouragement and consolation! *Ward!*

"Was ever anybody so kind? Oh, Enid, how lucky we knew a man like that!" Mrs. Norton said for the hundredth time.

"He's sorry for us, I suppose," Enid answered, with an irrepressible flash of bitterness. "Very likely we have kept him from some pleasant engagement, and he wishes we were at the bottom of the sea!"

She knew! But though the ache in her heart was a savage one, it was her mother and Channing she had to think about now. How, how was she ever to tell them?

She waited till their door was closed behind them, and then, in desperation, blurted it out:

"Mother, we must go home. I can't—I won't marry Channing!"

"Enid!"

"I know! I know it's treating him shamefully. And I know how hard it will be to go back—the gossip, the uncertainty of my getting another school so late in the summer, the straits we'll be in after spending so much money. I know all that, and I'm sorry—sorrower than I can tell you!—that you will have to bear it all with me. But, mother, I can't marry him—a stranger! However well I used to like him, I don't know him now. Between us, we've all three made a hideous mistake!"

Mrs. Norton argued a little and got out her handkerchief, but on the whole she took it very well.

"All right, all right. I shan't say another word," she sighed at last, and went, wiping her eyes, into the bedroom and shut the door.

Channing next! White and shaken, but still resolute, Enid sat down at the desk and wrote him a letter, gently phrased, but very final. And because she knew now what suffering was, she gave him what comfort there might be in an explanation: "I have learned what love is, Channing, and the friendship, affection, all that I feel for you, cannot take its place in marriage."

Hours later or minutes—sometimes there is not much difference between them—there came a knock at the door, and Channing Morse's card was brought in. She gave the page her letter and sat down again, with her head in her hands. Another interval—another knock and another card, on which was written: "I must see you."

"Bring the gentleman up," she told the page, and waited lifelessly. "Come in."

The door opened, and a tall, clean-

shaven man entered—a man whom she knew, and yet did not know at all.

"Enid! For goodness' sake, don't you know me yet? Have I sacrificed my nice, new beard all in vain?" he demanded, laughing, and strode toward her.

"Mr.—Ward?" she whispered, hands outstretched to hold him off.

"Oh, my dear! And I should have known you in Tibet!"

"You're not—not Channing?"

"Why didn't you look at the card I gave you last night? But you never would listen when I tried to explain, and even when I told you about the girl I was to meet—and marry—" His voice lost its laughing note, and somehow he got possession of her hands.

"Listen, dear! I crossed simply to make the return trip with you. I meant it for a surprise. But when I found you didn't recognize me—Well, I found out, too, that 'affection and friendship' would content me no more than they would you. So I determined to win you, not as the boy you used to like, but as the man I am. I wanted you to love me! And when your note came just now—"

"Oh!" She drew back, her cheeks flaming. "You're very sure whom I meant! How do you know?"

"Ward told me!" Now he was laughing again. "He saw it in your eyes, just as—if you will kindly look at me—you will see it in mine!"

"I—I hate you!" she stormed—but circumstances spoiled the effect of it.

Considerably later, she remembered her mother. "Poor dear! Worrying all this time! We must go tell her, Channing."

"She's asleep and won't wake up for an hour. How do I know? Because she promised it this morning, when we were talking over old times," he said, with the utmost composure. "What? Oh, no, you don't! Come sit down and we'll argue it out!"

The Epidemic

By Anne O'Hagan

Author of "Capulet and Montague in Toomey's Court," "A Gift of Christmas," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY G. C. PUGSLEY

ONE hesitates, unless cynically minded, to attribute the deeper experiences of life to trifles; yet it is certain that had Alida Sterritt played better bridge, the course of her life for a brief period would have been other than it was. For, had she played better bridge, she would not have loitered behind the other women as they trooped to the dining room, to cool her cheeks after Mrs. Roberts' asplike dart of the tongue, so to speak, at her ineptitude at cards. And had she not lingered— But let us proceed in an orderly manner.

It was the absence of Marian Vane from the season's last meeting of the West River Bridge Club that accounted for Mrs. Sterritt's presence in Mrs. Guthrie's cool, blossom-scented, shadowy drawing-rooms that afternoon in early June. The Sterritts were newcomers in West River, and though the suburb had warmly pronounced them charming, the conservative autocrats at the head of the bridge club still held it undesirable to ask Mrs. Sterritt to be of its membership until at least a year's residence in the Georgian house behind the maples had confirmed the first impressions of her desirability. But that morning, when Marian Vane had telephoned, somewhat abruptly, that she was going to her father's for a visit, Mrs. Guthrie had leaped at the chance of testing Mrs. Sterritt's bridge; it was generally agreed that in all other qualifications she was fit for that exclusive body.

The verdict by the end of the afternoon was that she lacked either natural aptitude for cards, or practice at them. She played with an amiable vagueness little less than criminal in the opinion of the experienced, hawk-eyed, Indian-remembered experts by whom she was surrounded. Yet she was so pleasant to look upon as she sat, golden-haired, tall, and jonquillike in her pale-green linen, pondering the cards in her white, unjeweled hands; her flushed little smile of apology for blunders was so persuasive; her wide-eyed surprise over her occasional accidental successes was so lovable, that even her hostess, that rigid disciplinarian, felt they must contrive to make room for her next year. Mrs. Guthrie promised herself to undertake her education in the important department of auction.

The talk had been somewhat of the absent member of the club—a danger to which Mrs. Vane had, of course, exposed herself in venturing to stay away. Between hands, the women said that Marian had seemed seedy, edgy, for weeks past; but they expressed surprise, even those who passed for her intimates, at the intelligence that she had gone to Boston. It must have been a sudden resolution; she had not spoken of it yesterday when they had seen her. They hoped she had had no bad news from home?

"She said not," Mrs. Guthrie replied, dealing cards with swift, practiced strokes. "But she was very curt and close-mouthed."

It was Alida Sterritt who elucidated the affair for them when the last hand had been lost and won, and the women had strolled to the dining room to their tea. Crossing the hall, she was impelled by a certain diffidence she felt as the outsider in this little group of intimates to dally for a moment at the table where the afternoon's papers lay folded. She had no interest at all in the news of the day; but her last partner, Mrs. Roberts, a delicately articulated, sharp-tongued little widow in filmy mourning, lavender lightened, had managed to overwhelm her with a sense of responsibility for her, Mrs. Roberts', loss of the first prize, a parasol with a handle of amethyst quartz, and she had dropped behind the others to escape the lady's clear exposition of the mistakes by which she, Alida, had lowered Mrs. Roberts' score, until then triumphantly highest.

The papers were the excuse for her loitering. And then, breathlessly, she entered the room, with its tinkle of ice in the glasses of mild sauterne punch and clinking of spoons against the handleless pink Staffordshire cups that were the uneasy pride of Mrs. Guthrie's heart, the paper in her hands.

"Oh!" she cried, almost glad, for the second, to banish the memory of her mistakes even by such a piece of news. "Here is the reason for Mrs. Vane's visit home. She's Mrs. Ordway Vane, isn't she? The chemical-works wife? She's filed papers in a divorce suit——"

"What?" they chorused, crowding about her. "What? Marian Vane?" They caught the paper from her hands; they read rapidly, mumblingly. They looked at one another accusingly.

"Did you know? Or you? Or you?"

And when they had satisfied themselves that there had been no concealment, only ignorance, among those who were counted Marian Vane's friends, they went back to the printed page and looked again at one another with new blankness in their faces.

"The correspondent's name not mentioned in the petition—— The correspondent! Then Ordway Vane had——" They gazed at one another, horrified. West River had had no scandals for the decade and a half of its development-company existence.

"But they seemed devoted," faltered one voice.

"Or, at any rate, completely understanding," amended another.

Mrs. Guthrie's teeth snapped, and she, the West River oracle, spoke.

"He always took far too much freedom," she asserted firmly. "Playing tennis with half the girls in the place, instead of with his wife——"

"But Marian didn't care for tennis," broke in a friend of Marian's, who had personal reasons for objecting to the intrusion of that harmless sport among the preliminaries to a divorce suit. "I played tennis with him myself!"

"Lunching with any one whom he happened to meet in town," went on the chronicler of Mr. Vane's shortcomings.

"Oh, come now, Mrs. Guthrie!" protested another woman, with heightened color. "You've lunched with him yourself. I've lunched with him——"

"I'm old enough to be his mother." Mrs. Guthrie's emphasis was unmistakable.

"And Marian certainly never denied herself the pleasure of lunching with a chance friend merely because he was a man," another cried, accusing and vindicating herself in one breath.

"It all tended in the same direction," Mrs. Guthrie insisted. "Toward a disregard—a loosening of the marriage tie. Marian should have come down upon him firmly when she first had reason to suspect his nature. He should have been——"

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Guthrie! As if prohibitions and scenes would have helped at all! No, if one has cause for jealousy——"



She played with an amiable vagueness little less than criminal in the opinion of the experienced, hawk-eyed experts by whom she was surrounded.

And in another minute the room was a babel of differing opinions in regard to the proper wifely attitude toward an errant spouse, the proper womanly attitude toward suspicion. Alida, who had precipitated all this by her introduction of the evening newspaper, stood an inch or two outside it, listening, half amused, half troubled, by what she heard. Suddenly one of the young matrons wheeled upon her.

"What would you do, Mrs. Sterritt, if you were jealous of your husband?"

Alida's mouth, large, lovable, well cut, curved into a smile of protest.

"No, you mustn't laugh," cried the other. "You might be, you know! You might be even if there weren't the slightest ground for it, and then what would you do?"

Alida looked almost as helpless as she had looked confronting a handful of cards with no idea as to which one would lead to victory, which to defeat.

"But I don't know. I never thought about it," she said.

"That's a magnificent tribute to Mr. Sterritt," said Lorraine Roberts, a trifle tartly. "How long have you been married, may one ask?"

"Eight years," replied Alida.

"Eight years! And to so charming, so open-hearted a husband! And you've never had occasion to frame a working code for jealousy! Congratulations, my dear Mrs. Sterritt!"

"I'm doubtless lacking in ingenuity as well as in imagination," answered Alida. Her voice, for all its slow gentleness, conveyed a rebuke, almost a snub. Lorraine Roberts reddened.

"It's I who am lacking in perception of when to stop," she said.

Alida laughed, half in acceptance of the other woman's apology, half in apology for her own momentary irritation.

"No, I—of when to begin!" she said.

And then, through the excited talk around her, she made her way to her hostess to say good-by. All these women had known Marian Vane a long time; she felt a little sense of intrusion among them at the moment. But Mrs. Guthrie, holding her by the hand, detained her.

"It's too bad your first glimpse of the bridge club should end in an uproar of this sort," she said. "We wanted you to think well of us—we wanted to make you promise to join us next season. I hope you will. West River is really a very decent place in spite of this insanity of Marian's—or Ordway's."

"It's a lovely place," agreed Alida.

"I haven't a doubt," pursued the elder lady, still holding her guest by the hand, "that it's all nonsense anyway, this business! Marian was a fool, of course, to give Ordway so much rope. It's half her fault, whatever it is. And probably it's nowhere nearly as bad as she thinks. She's just grown jealous, and lost her head." Mrs. Guthrie was determined upon optimism for the sake of West River.

"Well," the clamor broke forth about

them again, "what *would* you do if you became jealous of your husband? Can one keep one's head in such circumstances?"

At least half a dozen voices were raised at once in reply. This one would bear her indignity in proud silence; that one would not—for a moment, for a second—tolerate any "nonsense" from the partner of her sorrows. This one would win him again to his true allegiance by the unfaltering love and devotion she would display; that one would—vulgarily—give him a taste of his own medicine.

"Mrs. Sterritt," announced Lorraine, the recollection of the lost amethyst-handled parasol again rankling, "boasts that she has never had occasion to consider what she would do in case of jealousy"

Alida colored faintly. "That's quite true," she admitted. "I suppose I'm very unimaginative."

"A very good thing to be, my dear!" Mrs. Guthrie commended her. "Provided, of course, that you drive with a good, short rein! It's this new-fangled notion that yoke fellows can each go his own way without a smash-up that makes all the trouble. It did with the Vanes. There's no natural harm in either of them."

"Dear Mrs. Guthrie, how you mix your metaphors!" giped Lorraine Roberts. "First, Mrs. Sterritt is the driver of the matrimonial chariot, and poor, dear Mr. Sterritt is the animal in harness; then she's one of the pulling team! I'm going, before you corrupt my style! Good-by. Such a good time!"

"Good-by, you impertinent baggage! Good night, Mrs. Sterritt. Give my regards to your delightful husband."

"You see, Mrs. Sterritt," Lorraine laughed softly, as they left the house together, "we all call him delightful. You really must begin to think what you would do in case you should become jealous!"

Alida paid the other woman's persistent and spiteful vivacity the tribute of a somewhat perfunctory smile. She was glad their paths separated at the corner. Nevertheless, as she walked on toward her comfortable house behind the maples, the jeering question continued to sound in her ears—what would she do if she became jealous of Pennington? The Vanes had always seemed to her casual interest in them quite as devoted as the other young married persons of her acquaintance. She recalled Mr. Vane's solicitude in covering his wife's pretty shoulders from a draft at a club dance, not more than a month ago. Had that attitude of affectionate protection, that little trifling act of watchfulness and care, the pressure of his hand that she had seen accompany it—had it all been a deception? She shivered a little in the June twilight.

"Mr. Sterritt has telephoned, ma'am, that he won't be home to dinner," announced the maid, opening the door to her. The girl was a new one; she had a colorless voice. Alida perceived its flatness for the first time—its automatic, uninterested quality—and disliked it. Delia, who had recently left her service at the lure of matrimony, had always given that not unusual message with an understanding, a quick rush of explanation, that had robbed it of its dreariness. The new girl merely went on: "The message is on the telephone pad. Cook says would you be pleased to take your dinner at half past six, as long as Mr. Sterritt isn't coming? It's church—a mission," she added illuminatingly.

Alida, intent upon the message inscribed upon the pad, did not answer at once. She was reading:

Mr. Sterritt says he has got to stay in the city to diner with mister downing an sum other men he will be hoam on the Ten ait.

"Cook says——" the monotonous voice began again.

"Oh, yes, yes! At half past six. And

set me a little table on the library porch, Hilda——"

She remembered that when she had first gone to the Vanes' house, dutifully returning Marian's dutiful call upon her—was it only six or seven months ago?—she had found her hostess laughing over the triumphant misspelling of a message on the telephone pad—a message, as it happened, from Ordway, announcing that he would not be home to dinner. No doubt as to the validity of his excuse had seemed to cloud Mrs. Vane's amused face as they had drawn their chairs close to the wood fire, drinking tea and making tentative essays toward acquaintance, toward friendship. Had her hostess, on that pleasant, autumnal afternoon, been jealous? Had she had cause for jealousy? Had the amusement over the Finnish-English transcription of Ordway Vane's message been all a piece of graceful acting? Alida remembered the careless, natural sound of Mrs. Vane's voice saying:

"I'm lucky these days if I see Ordway twice a week at dinner. They're reorganizing the works, and it seems to take no end of evening meetings."

She wished she had not remembered that remark. For it was now more than a month since Penn had been detained in town two or three evenings a week on business connected with the reorganization of the firm. Mr. Downing, the senior partner, wished to withdraw from active participation in the business——

She shook her straight, slim shoulders impatiently, as if to rid them of an incubus. She ran quickly up the stairs to her room; in activity she would lose the thing trying to insinuate itself into her consciousness. But even as she banged drawers and doors with a noise meant to silence voices of the mind, even as she tossed tea gowns and lingerie about, and drew the water for her bath with a deafening, unnecessary flow,



"It's quite evident that I'm going insane," she told herself, but her voice lacked conviction.

she heard a later remark of Marian Vane's. It had been weeks later—doubtless it was the expression of fears beginning to find lodgment in her heart.

"Have you ever thought how little, after all, we know our husbands' lives, we suburbanites? They disappear from

our knowledge on the eight-fifty-six, after coffee, which, of course, we do know that they take with sugar or without! They come back, after a day in which we have no part, for dinner at seven—that is, when they do come! Of course, there are nights and nights when they don't! They're asleep at eleven, off again on the eight-fifty-six. It's wonderful we should lay claim to any acquaintance with them! But then, of course, they have equally little knowledge of us—only they don't care!"

Of course, the reason for that speech was clear now. She had begun to suspect her husband.

How had she acted when first suspicion awoke? What had awakened it? "Was it something said, something done?" Alida thought, in the language of Browning. How could one act when first a doubt of one's husband's loyalty— Ah, it was unmistakable! His ardor might chill, of course, his interest wane. But his loyalty, his truth—never, never! Yet here was Mrs. Vane instituting a suit for divorce. The Vanes had certainly seemed no less high-minded than the rest of the world! And they had come to that! She let the hand that was brushing her thick, straight, fair hair

drop limply to her side.

"It's quite evident that I'm going insane," she told herself, but her voice lacked conviction.

"After all," began the new, inward monitor, whose existence she had never dreamed of until to-day, "after all, why

not decide how you would act if you should ever become jealous? As they told you this afternoon, you might—any time; without a shadow of excuse for it, either. What would you do? Probably you will never be caught in a burning house, but you made up your mind, years and years ago, exactly how you would act, if you ever were! You've rehearsed, in your fancy, a dozen times, just how you would try to rescue a drowning person without giving him a chance to pull you down with him. Yet you've never been in any water accident—probably never will be! Why not make up your mind exactly what you would do in case you should become jealous." The brush was moving again now.

"In the first place," said Alida firmly to herself, "I should never play the disgusting part of a prying wife. If Penn should ever lie to me, it would be because he wanted to, not because my suspicious questions left him no alternative. No, I'd never question him. I'd never seek to find out anything about him except what he chose to tell me. It would be too hideous, life would be too undignified and terrible, if one were watching, waiting—"

She had piled her hair high on her head, and was slipping into the tea gown for her solitary meal.

"And I would not nag. I would not be disagreeable. No. I should treat him courteously, pleasantly, friendly. Of course, if I were sure—" She suddenly laughed, to realize how swift had been her journey from the imaginings of a wife unjustified in jealousy to those of a wife "sure" of her husband's errancy. "But if I were sure," she went on, after her laugh, "of course I couldn't permit any—any—love-making. That would be a relief to him, too. No—I'd be merely pleasant and companionable, until things became quite unbearable. And then— Oh, I don't know!

Would I say to him: 'Penn, dear, what is the use of keeping up the farce? I don't want you except as you want to be mine. Now that you don't, let us end this make-believe, and be honest. You are free.'

"Would I say that? Could I? For I should be so sure, so miserably sure, that Penn must really love me! I should be so sure that anything else was an infatuation, and that he would recover. I should be so perfectly certain that it was an attack of mumps or measles, or a delirium, and that pretty soon, if I only behaved myself, he'd be all well again, with no disfigurement, no impairment—and so grateful to me! As he was after the typhoid, that time—"

She went slowly down the stairs to the small table that Hilda had drawn up in the inglenook, a corner of the side piazza, outside the long French windows. Sweet-smelling vines screened her retreat. There was a look of pensive, noble resignation on Alida's face. Hilda stood by, dispassionate, glum.

"No," said Alida, speaking aloud, "I don't think I'll have any soup.' Just the chops and peas and some salad and cheese and coffee. I'll ring when I want the salad—don't wait. Put a bell here and I'll ring—"

The outer door opened. Pennington came into the hall.

"Why, Penn!" his wife cried. "I thought you weren't coming home to dinner—that Mr. Downing—"

"It was postponed," answered Pennington somewhat more briefly, somewhat more wearily, than was his wont. "I didn't telephone again—didn't seem worth while. You look very cozy. What have you there? Can you make room for another plate, Hilda, on that card table? All right, I'll have my dinner here, too."

Alida watched him narrowly. He was pale, and there were dark lines beneath his eyes. It seemed to her that

about his mouth there were wrinkles that had not been there in the morning.

"If he had been going to dine with—some woman," said Alida's newly aroused imagination to her, "and she had failed him, he would look like that—listless, disappointed, tired."

"What's the matter, old girl?" asked Mr. Sterritt, emerging from the dining room with a cocktail shaker in his hand. "Anything wrong with me? You don't mind my not decorating for this meal, do you?"

"No," said Alida meditatively. Then her eyes darkened. "You've already decorated somewhat, haven't you? Isn't that tie—"

"Clever child, it is! It's a new one. And my cheek is freshly shaven, also. I was getting ready for the dinner at the Manhattan when it was called off. Have a cocktail?"

"No, thank you. Why do you take one? You don't usually."

"I merely happened to feel like it," he replied, seating himself opposite her.

"Penn," she announced suddenly, as he spread across his knees the napkin Hilda had brought him, "you didn't kiss me when you came in."

Pennington raised his harassed-looking eyes to hers in some astonishment.

"Didn't I?" A gleam of amusement lit his face. "Well, you're charming enough in that yellow thing to deserve a salute to-night. Lean across the table—that's the beauty of having such a small one. What? You won't? All right, then, I'll come around—"

"You needn't," said Alida coldly. "No—I mean it! Please go away!"

Before the distaste in her voice, Pennington did the only thing he could do gracefully—shrugged his shoulders, and returned to his seat opposite her. Alida watched him for a second.

"He didn't really want to kiss me," she said to herself. "He didn't really want to. And he doesn't ask me what

makes me so capricious—he doesn't dare ask me!"

Aloud she remarked: "Why was the dinner put off?"

"Oh, Hazlitt couldn't come, and without him there was nothing doing. I'll be glad when the thing's settled. I'm worn out with the details—"

The telephone rang. Hilda came into the room again.

"A lady to speak to you, sir. I said you was at dinner—"

"For me you mean, Hilda?" Mrs. Sterritt spoke authoritatively.

"No'm, for Mr. Sterritt. I said you was at dinner, but she said you expected the message—"

"Oh, yes!" Miss Verenschuler, Alida."

He mentioned the name of his secretary, and hurried to the telephone. She listened to the one-sided talk with strained attention. It consisted chiefly of hurried "yeses" on Pennington's part; she could gather little or nothing from it. But that suddenly awakened imagination of hers was busy.

"If he had been going to dine with some woman—and if she had failed him—and if he came home—and if she called him up here, at his house—Oh, the brazen, heartless thing to do! The vulgar thing to do!—he would be eager and queer and noncommittal, like that!"

"Alida, what time does the next train go in to town?" He tossed the question into the library. "I forgot these early-evening ones—we use them so seldom. Look it up, then, won't you please? I'm holding the wire here. Seven-thirty-seven? Thank you!"

Again he addressed his remarks to the instrument on the hall wall: "I can get the seven-thirty-seven in. I'll be there by half past eight or a quarter of nine. Tell them, please!" He came back into the room. "Miss Verenschuler says"—he addressed the words to Alida—"that Howe has been called to

London by the sudden illness of his wife. So there's got to be a meeting to-night, Hazlitt or no Hazlitt. I'm off! Don't wait up for me, honey—you look tired." He leaned over the back of her chair to kiss her, but she jerked her head away. He straightened himself. "What in thunder is the matter with you to-night, Lida?" he demanded, incensed.

"Don't waste your time before your precious—meeting," said Alida, with a long pause before the word, "trying to understand your wife."

He hesitated, frowned down on her for a moment, and then sighed, a quick, irritated sigh.

"It's true I haven't the time for psychologizing to-night," he said curtly. "Well, good-by for a little while." He was gone. Alida sat staring meditatively at her plate. She was roused by the maid. No, she didn't want anything more. No, no coffee.

She went slowly up the stairs to her own room again. How often, she wondered, had Ordway Vane been summoned from his home after Marian had thought him safely hers for the evening. Miss Verenschuler, indeed! Hazlitt, Howe!

Well, but perhaps it had really been Miss Verenschuler, that faithful, thick-waisted, gray-haired secretary, upon whose system, Penn sometimes declared, the whole fabric of Downing, Sterritt & Co. rested. Perhaps it really had been she.

"I'll call up the office!" Alida suddenly declared to herself, and moved toward the telephone.

But she paused on the stairs, the red mounting to her cheeks. Good heavens! Was she going crazy? Was she actually about to try to spy—vulgarly, horribly to *spy*—upon her husband? What had happened to her? She turned and went back to her room.

When, she wondered, as she seated herself with a book from her reading

stand, when had Marian Vane become so obsessed by the notion of her husband's faithlessness that she had begun to spy, that she had begun to confirm the whispers of her intuitions? Ah, a woman's intuitions!

She tried to read, but she could not. She was engaged in fabricating a romance, a tragedy, far more absorbing to her than any ever written. She was the protagonist of the tale she manufactured, trying first this color, then that. Every now and then during the weaving of the tale, she shook herself back to the world that she knew, as a sleeper, half awake, shakes himself wholly awake, saying to his drowsing consciousness: "But this is all a dream, you know! This isn't true! The truth is that I am half asleep in my own bed, in my own house, dreaming this preposterous nonsense!" So, occasionally, she spoke to herself. But whenever that tonic thought occurred to her, there occurred also the thought that doubtless thus had Marian Vane often reasoned against her forebodings, often denied her instincts, before the dreary day when she was obliged to admit them all to be not the tortuous weavings of a nightmare, but the facts of the hard, bright, waking day!

By and by, when it was nearly time for the last train out, she undressed and went to bed. She did not wish to see Penn that night. She did not wish to search his eyes for the truth, to weigh his words for a hidden meaning, to test his tenderness, perhaps, to discover whether it was remorse or love that prompted it. By and by, as she lay still in the moonlit darkness, she heard the front door open and close softly. It was long after the last train—he must have taken the train to East Bank on the other road, where the service was better adapted for night owls, and have driven or walked across. A very late meeting, indeed!

The doors of her room were both sig-

nificantly closed—the one into the hall and the one into Penn's dressing room, where she had turned down the couch covers as a hint to him that she did not wish to be disturbed. She heard him creaking about. She felt a great sense of wrong and misery that he did not ignore the hint and come in to her room, to sit upon the side of her bed and tell her the events of the meeting. But if there had not been a meeting, of course there would be no events to chronicle. And if—if there had been a rendezvous, of course he would not wish to see her after it. He would welcome the prohibition of the closed doors.

By and by she heard the handle turned gently. She steadied her breathing to the rise and fall of the sleeper. He came to her bedside, looked down upon her for a second, sighed, and went away again. Why had he sighed? Why had he sighed as he looked down upon her? What sadness, what compunction, stirred within him?

She awakened late the next morning. That was natural, for it had been very late when she had finally fallen asleep. But she also awakened stiff and sore, as if she had spent the day before in hard, unaccustomed labors. For a second she was concerned with the weariness and lassitude of her body. Then she remembered the mental misery of the night. What a piece of morbid insanity that had been! It was right that she should pay for it with this dull ache through all her muscles!

And then the devil who had taken lodgment in her heart whispered to her: "How often do you suppose poor Marian Vane awoke to discredit all the gloomy imaginings of the night—before she found them all true, all true?"

She put the thought from her. She sprang out of bed, wrapped a peignoir about her, and ran to the door of the dressing room before the impulse had a chance to cool. She flung it open—the room was empty. It was disordered

—of course! Penn always conducted the operation of dressing as if he were a branch agency for a hurricane. But the room was more chaotic than usual—drawers and closets more agape, linen and tweed more conspicuously where they should not be. She brushed the lingering remnants of sleep from her eyes. There was a great, blue-penciled scrawl in the mirror above his chiffonier—that was familiar; it was his accustomed manner of communication when he could not achieve speech:

Off for Boston, business. You looked so tired I didn't like to wake you. Back the day after to-morrow. St. Botolph's as usual.

It had happened before, frequently, in their eight happy years together, that he had been obliged to go off at a moment's notice. It had been happening with a good deal of regularity during this last month or two of the—reorganization of the business. They were trying to induce some Boston capital to "come in," he told her, on the reorganization. It had never occurred to her to question the necessity of the journeys—it had never occurred to her to question anything that Pennington had seen fit to tell her! And yet, all those women yesterday afternoon—nice women, too!—seemed to have theories on jealousy, methods of testing their husbands' statements—Chilled, she went slowly back to her room.

She read the morning papers more carefully than she had read the evening ones, studying the Vane divorce case, but she was not greatly enlightened. The proceedings had received metropolitan notice chiefly because Ordway Vane had been an athlete of international prowess in his college days, twelve or fifteen years before, and because his marriage to Marian had been a "romance" of the sort dearly beloved by the newspapers—the romance of the beautiful girl rescued from a watery grave by an eminently desirable young man.



"It's true I haven't the time for psychologizing to-night," he said curtly. 953

This morning the columns added little to Alida's knowledge of the situation; they recapitulated Ordway's glorious victories while at Princeton; they recalled Marian's excellent lineage, and the political career of her father, the ex-ambassador; and they referred to the aqueous beginning of the marriage of which the ending was this sordid one. But as for the present matter, it was evident that they had little information. The petition for a divorce had been filed, the correspondent was still unnamed—a fact that Alida found herself resenting almost as much as it was evident the newspapers resented it—Marian, her father, and her husband all refused to give out interviews, and the hearing was to be secret, before a referee.

On another page there was a brief editorial comment on the undemocracy of the legal procedure that enabled well-placed persons to obtain divorces with the minimum of publicity. Alida felt herself in sympathy with this view, although hitherto she had been of the belief that divorce news was subversive of public morality!

But though there was lamentably little to learn of the Vanes, there seemed to be numerous other disillusioned wives, numerous other light-minded husbands, numerous other unhappy marriages in the world. Other divorce suits were being tried. Not all cases were conducted with the reprehensible secrecy that the newspaper and Alida deplored this morning as opposed to true democracy. For the first time in her life, she took an interest in this sort of news. She read the testimony of this wife who had awakened to a sudden knowledge that her husband was untrue to her; of that servant who had a remarkable memory for dates and places and faces; of friends, hotel keepers, waiters, chauffeurs—It was all very disgusting, very repugnant! She had a fastidious distaste for it, yet she

could not forbear to read. For, no matter how horrible and how vulgar they all seemed to her, these women and men who were declaring to the world their doubts of one another, they had all wrought out some sort of an answer for that question of yesterday afternoon, that haunting "What would you do if you were jealous?"

She went in town that day to do some shopping, to kill time, to still the tiresome, questioning voice. She met Lorraine Roberts in the tea room where she stopped for luncheon. Mrs. Roberts was more than usually gnatlike, though she began her buzzing and stinging on indifferent topics.

"I stayed in town last night," she said cheerfully to Alida, "to be on hand to meet my niece this morning. I simply can't get up for those early suburban trains! She's just through school at Auburndale, and she came down with a lot of girls and a teacher on the Fall River boat. I had to meet her and put her aboard her train for Milwaukee. I'm not so energetic as your husband. I saw him at the station, and he said he had come in on the six-fifty-nine, so as to take the eight o'clock over to Boston. A pretty girl, by the way, your cousin——"

"Yes," answered Alida mechanically. She wondered, dimly, if she would ever speak again or if she had expended her last breath in uttering that one word. Her cousin!

"I quite envied her," Mrs. Roberts went on, "her five hours with Mr. Sterritt. You know I told you yesterday I'm an extravagant admirer of his."

Alida smiled indulgently. She did not need to answer that banality; she was not obliged yet to try her capacity for speech.

"Where was it she had been at school?" pursued Mrs. Roberts.

"Rosemary Hall," replied Alida.

It was wonderful! Her words came as softly, as evenly, as if she had not

been stabbed to the heart. She, who had no cousin! She, who had not the slightest conception as to the identity of the person whose five hours with Pennington this silly little fool professed to envy! Lorraine Roberts looked at her a little curiously as she rose to go.

"You aren't going to stay in very long, are you? That's good! You look tired and fagged. Well, good-by! I'm so glad to have seen you." And still she hesitated.

"Good-by!" smiled Alida.

The woman went away a little slowly.

His cousin— No, her cousin! Oh, well, what matter whose cousin? She had felt it—she had felt things not straight, not true, between them! Strange the wonderful intuitions of a loving woman's heart! And now what was she going to do? What was she going to do?

"Oh, my God!" she cried, striking the table fiercely. "How suddenly it's all come true! How suddenly it's all come true!"

No, that was probably not so. It was merely her awakening that had been sudden. The truth had probably been like this for a long time. Probably the truth had been as Marian Vane had finally proclaimed it through that hideous herald, the divorce suit, for a long time before she had awakened to it. But what was she going to do?—she, Alida Sterritt, who had never considered jealousy until yesterday, and who now found room for no other emotion in the world! How wise, how provident, those wives who had a code prepared for such an emergency!

By the time Pennington returned from Boston, tired, harassed—he said that Boston capital was shy and suspicious!—she had made up her mind what to do. She would wait. She would watch. She would even hope.

"Did you see any one you knew going over?" she asked.

He answered that he had not. Her

heart fell. She had hoped against hope that there would be some explanation of the cousin that could satisfy her. She wanted to be satisfied! But he was going brazenly to deny a companion, was he? He meant to deceive her. How long could she bear it? For a week she lived the wretched question—how would she ever again be sure of anything he said? Suddenly she had an inspiration. She would wait, as she had said she would wait, but she would spare herself the daily, hourly lie!

"Penn," she said, and her voice shook a little, "I should like to go away for a few months—abroad or out West or somewhere." Penn stared at her in utter bewilderment. It seemed to her that he grew a shade paler than he had been.

"You want to go away from home—from me?" he asked stupidly. "For a few months?" All the separations of their married life had been measured by days. But she nodded in reply. She could not trust her voice. "Why, Alida, what's the matter? Are you ill?" A genuine anxiety rang in his tones. "Are you sick, and concealing it from me?"

"No, I'm all right," answered Alida. "That is, pretty well. I've been tired lately—and—apprehensive. But I'm well. Only I want to go away for a while—if we can afford it."

He looked hard at her.

"Oh, the money!" He dismissed that consideration lightly. "But I don't like this about your being tired and apprehensive. Of course, if you want to go away—from—home—" He spoke hesitatingly; something seemed to hinder his putting forward his own claims, the claims of his heart, to her; she noticed the hesitancy, and drew her own conclusions. "Of course, if you want to go, it can be arranged. But—you haven't seemed yourself lately, Alida! And you admit you don't feel up to the mark. You can't go anywhere until you have had a talk with Doctor Lunn."



"I was forgetting, you poor child!" he said. "Ah, I'm glad you've come back to me in your right mind."

His conscience was speaking, Alida thought. But she assented listlessly.

Perhaps, by the time she came home again, his fancy would have returned to its allegiance. Perhaps he would be hungry for her. And, if that should be so, could she forgive him? Could she return and live in the old joy and trustfulness with him? Ah, never, never again! If he could stray once, he could stray again——

"No, no!" she interrupted the inner voice. "That is not so. People do not run into the same dangers again and again. He is not light by nature. If he should come back, he would come back to stay."

She heard herself promising to see the doctor before she went away. She heard herself saying that she would as lief go for a month—or so—up to Nova Scotia, to a hamlet that she remembered from her girlhood, as go abroad.

"Then I could run up for a week or a fortnight," he suggested.

"No, I want to be alone for a while." It seemed to her that there was fear in the deep scrutiny he turned upon her, that it was fear that kept him from questioning her about her amazing desires and decisions, so unlike herself! But he was silent.

"He doesn't dare talk to me about my feelings and his," she told herself, as, during the next dull, dragging week, she packed. Then she went to the doctor's as she had promised.

When she left his office, her face was ashen, her steps unsteady. Doctor Lunn watched her from his window, perturbed. He knew how deeply she had longed for a child, how cruel had been her disappointment at the denial of nature in the early years of her marriage. And now, when she had ceased even to hope, and he had, as he thought, lighted the fires of joy anew for her, she had begged him not to let her husband know—yet! She had forced the promise from him. Forced it, although he had

assured her that she need fear no second disappointment.

She went away, carrying the secret with her—all the secrets—the distrust of Pennington, the belief in his errancy, and the knowledge that destiny was to give her a gift that would make her again desirable in his eyes. She knew how proud he would be! She knew that, though she had not been able to hold him, a child would hold him anchored. But—did she want him back on those terms?

It was September when she returned to West River. She came unannounced. An item in a Boston paper had brought her—the announcement of Marian Vane's marriage to a certain Captain Prevost, of the British army. He had been, so the paper said, an old acquaintance of the days of her father's ambassadorship; the word "suitor" was not used, but Alida seemed to read it in the few lines, notwithstanding.

Mrs. Prevost was the wife of Ordway Vane, of the Vane-MacKnight Chemical Company, until last June, when she obtained a decree of divorce from him, Mr. Vane making no defense to the allegations against him.

For so noncommittal a sentence it seemed to Alida singularly full of meaning.

So it had been Marian, then, who chafed at the bond that tied her to Ordway! Marian who was at fault, in heart, at any rate!

But even though Marian Vane had herself been the offender in the Vane household, and though Ordway Vane had been no villain, but a chivalrous fool of a husband, how did that explain her own husband's cousin? Never mind—she would not question that yet. A flood of belief was sweeping resistlessly in upon her. So it had been Marian, not her husband— Suddenly she was filled with an intense longing for home. The next day she started.

Pennington had been keeping bache-

lor's hall in the Georgian house behind the maples during all the weeks of her absence. The house looked like it! She was smitten with housewifely compunctions over him. She would take Nora to task for this uncared-for look of things! She fell to work. Papers were thrown out, dust was laid, shades were drawn, flowers were gathered. At five o'clock there was a dim, sweet, cool order where at three there had been a cheerless disarray. It was by that air of repose which a home wears—by that and the blossoms on the hall table—that Pennington knew her at home before he had hung up his hat. He went up the stairs slowly to her room. She was at home again—but how? What was her mood, after her strange, incomprehensible withdrawal of the early summer?

She was in her room, in something soft, loose, white, and lacy. She gave a cry as he came toward her. She stretched out her arms. A piece of gray note paper had dropped into her lap.

"Oh, Penn!" she cried, her voice breaking with love. He drew her toward him. "Oh, Penn! Oh, Penn! I've been so wicked—so miserable—And you, you have been so lonely and forlorn!"

"Lonely enough," answered Pennington, "but too busy to be quite forlorn. Oh, yes, a little forlorn, of course!"

"You're never going to be lonely or forlorn again, dearest," she whispered brokenly. "Never any more——"

"You're not going to run away from me again, then?" He tried to bring a note of lightness into their talk.

"Even if I should, Penn—even if I should leave you forever—you're never going to be lonely again. Don't you understand?"

"Alida! Not—— Oh, my dear little woman! And I have been thinking almost hardly of you for your—whim. As if you hadn't a right to your whims

—— Oh, my dear!" He kissed her, and she drooped a little in his arms.

By and by he went to his room to dress for dinner, and she moved constantly back and forth between the two rooms, talking with unwonted flow of words. Her trailing gown swept a piece of paper upon his floor; he stooped to pick it up when he saw it. It was the gray sheet she had been reading when he came upstairs. Glancing at it, he saw, in bold, heavy, black characters the words: "Mr. Sterritt with his charming young cousin." He lifted his head with a frown. His only cousins were old Jim and young Jack, and, though Jack was a nice enough boy, Pennington hardly thought the adjective "charming" appropriate. He entered Alida's room and laid the thing on her desk.

"Lida, love," he remembered to say to her in the middle of dinner, "what has some one been writing to you about my charming young cousin?"

Alida grew slowly and painfully red. She gulped down a glass of ice water before she answered. Then she said, in a small, shamed voice:

"I'll bring you the note, and you may see."

As he had so often done during the last few weeks of their life before she had gone away, he stared at her, a little mystified. She arose and slipped from the table. When she returned, she laid the letter before him. It ran:

MY DEAR MRS. STERRITT: I scarcely know how to write what I have to say, I am so ashamed, and so sorry. When I met you in town one day last June—just after Marian Vane's divorce suit had been announced, you remember, and after we had all had that silly talk at Mrs. Guthrie's about jealousy—I told you that I had seen Mr. Sterritt taking the Boston train with his charming young cousin. Now, while it was quite true that I had met him, and that he had said he was going to Boston, there was no cousin there; she was the fabrication of my malicious mind.

I thought you would stare, and say something that would give me the chance to laugh

at you and tease you—you remember that you had rather flaunted your lack of jealousy the day before! But you accepted the cousin so nonchalantly that I couldn't go on with the teasing. I began to think she must be real. I asked you where she had been to school, and you told me. I was forced to wonder if I were the victim of a delusion, and if Mr. Sterritt really had been taking a charming young cousin over to Boston! I have never known for sure—so perfect was your acceptance of the thing!—until to-day.

To-day I happened to ride out to West River on the train with him, and I asked him if he or you had any knowledge of schools for girls—mentioning that I thought I had heard that one of you had a cousin at a good one. He told me that neither you nor he possessed a girl cousin, in school or out!

Of course, I realize now what you have done. You either knew me for the silly joker I meant to be, and spoiled my fun, or you thought the likely thing, and played your part with perfect aplomb, giving me not the smallest chance for escape from the dilemma in which my cheap funniness had landed me. I'm really ashamed of my bad taste. I hope you'll forgive it, and that you and Mr. Sterritt will not laugh too scornfully at me for supposing that I could ever ruffle, even for the second I had planned, the calm serenity of your confidence. Sincerely yours,

LORRAINE ROBERTS.

Pennington laid the note upon the table. His eyes were stern when he lifted them to Alida's.

"So that was what it meant, your going away?" he said.

She nodded, more abashed and ashamed than she had ever been before him in her life. He looked at her

for a minute unsmilingly. She felt that she was being weighed in the balance. She raised her brimming eyes appealingly to him.

"Oh, I have been so miserable, Penn!" she cried.

"You deserved to be!" he told her shortly. "Didn't you, now? To think — Good Lord, Alida! How could you think such a thing? Hadn't you lived with me eight years, known my very heartbeats? Could I ever doubt you? I don't understand you."

Then, as her lip quivered and was swiftly bitten to rigidity again, he remembered. His face cleared, his eyes dwelt lovingly upon her. He crossed to her side of the table.

"I was forgetting, you poor child!" he said. "I was forgetting. Of course, you were ailing, you were notional! Ah, I'm glad you've come back to me in your right mind."

She leaned against him, and let him abide in his delusion. If he felt like attributing that dreadful delusion of hers to the mysterious forces that went to the making of their miraculous child, let him! It was better than that he should know it merely a contagion of jealousy; it was less ignoble so.

"And, anyway," she told herself, "perhaps he is right!"

Smiling at the thought of the beauty that was to crown their days, she put away forever all memory of her evil dream.



Something Different

By Mae Van Norman Long

Author of "The Girl in Rome," "Tam O'Dreams," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY HAROLD THOMAS DENISON

A VALENTINE wedding," the brown-faced girl was saying to the big fellow, "especially a valentine wedding in a country home, is the most picturesque thing you can imagine—that is, if it's swung right."

"And it's sure to be swung right," was the rejoinder.

A sparkle came into the gypsy face, but the big eyes looked up plaintively at the speaker.

"If only the bridesmaids wouldn't insist on all wearing the same shade of geranium, and demanding tunics when I'd planned on adorable frills."

"They insist, do they?"

"Well—almost. And they absolutely refuse to wear hats with a chin strap."

The big fellow chuckled. "They're not like Queen Louise, are they?"

"No—they've perfectly good throats. There's no reason why they should wear the chin straps—only it would be something different."

Her young voice was earnest, her face rapt, and the man looked at her and grinned appreciatively. Her head was resting against a cement pillar of the long, rug-strewn sun parlor in which they sat. Outside, the sun was reddening the snow, which was penciled over with the shadows of the bare trees. The girl's warm brown hair was glorified to gleaming copper against the light behind her. She returned the man's glance, colored, and then said quickly:

"I admit I do like unusual things, David. Why not?"

David Bruce grinned again.

"And what," he asked, after a pause, "will Miss Prudence Delaight, the bride, wear—in order to be different?"

"I shall wear red, also."

"Red?"

"Rather!"

There was a silence, and the girl looked up.

"David—how funny you look! You don't like the idea, do you?—any more than mother does."

"It seems odd—unconventional—a bride in red. You're too fair for red—perhaps?"

"Oh, no, I'm not! I'm not fair at all. I'm brown as a dryad. And, you know very well I'll be a Sir Joshua Reynolds picture, coming down that dark oak staircase, the firelight flickering on my gown, and the light from the stained-glass window on my head. Why should a wedding be all pale pinks and blues and hothouse roses and lilies of the valley?"

The girl whirled around on the cement seat and met the man's glance squarely. Prudence Delaight had a way of looking one straight in the face. As her eyes were wonderfully big and wonderfully alluring, her direct glance was sometimes disconcerting.

"I can't say the picture appeals to me," David Bruce said shortly.

The girl's tender red mouth stiffened, the dusky eyes flashed and then froze. "What a pity! However will you bear up under it, do you suppose?"

"Who thought up this crazy color scheme, anyway?"

"Wallace Strange. He's designed the gowns, you know, and superintended our rehearsals—he was afraid things might go wrong if we waited until you came down to-day—and he even had daddy put in another stained-glass window at the foot of the staircase with plenty of ambers and reds. And he got Westly Cooley, the composer, to promise to come down to play the wedding march on the big pipe organ on the landing. Oh, David, it will be a perfect poem of a wedding!"

"It'll be like a circus-day parade! Shall I order confetti and wear velvet breeches and a scarlet coat?"

A stain of crimson dyed the girl's pure olive cheek, her hands trembled. "Please move aside, David," she said, in a strangled tone. "I'm going back to the house."

David Bruce lifted her to her feet and held her by the shoulders, as she would have passed him.

"It's a crazy idea, now, isn't it, Prue?" he coaxed.

"We won't discuss it."

"We will discuss it. Look here, Prue, I'm not going to be made a monkey of, you know."

"Let me go, David Bruce! Let me go!"



DAVID THOMPSON ILLUSTRATION

"Shall I order confetti and wear velvet breeches and a scarlet coat?"

"Prue, listen! I admit you're adorable in red——"

"I wore it the evening we met," the girl whispered softly, swaying toward him, "the evening of St. Valentine's day."

"Dear—I remember——"

"And, David—you'd never have noticed me in white. I'm a plain little thing, Doddy—a brown wisp of a thing."

Until I began to dress in bizarre, fantastic creations, I was a wallflower at all the parties."

"And now you're a belle," David whispered, his lips on her hair. "But, Prue, I want my bride in white."

"I can't, David. What would the girls and the modiste and—and Wallace Strange think?"

"Strange? By Jove, Prue, does it matter what he thinks? You're not marrying Strange—you're marrying me."

"Yes," Prudence said, standing away from him, "I see. I'm marrying a dictatorial, unreasonable human being." David shrugged exasperatingly. "A person who wants to be deferred to, and consulted at every possible——"

"Just the same, I won't marry a girl in red."

There was a silence. Their eyes met stormily. The girl spoke roughly at last:

"You've three days in which to decide, David Bruce. I can't change my plans." Her lips had lost their color, and were not quite steady, but her head went up gallantly, and she turned, flung out of the sun parlor, raced across the terrace, and disappeared.

David Bruce muttered something between his teeth and sat down on the cement seat. He filled his pipe and sat there with a dour face till the dusk dropped down and veiled the white landscape. Then he started up, swore softly, and strode away to the village hotel, where he was staying.

The next morning, Prue, awaking heavy-eyed and unrefreshed after a restless night, had the following laconic note handed her by a smirking maid:

DEAR PRUE: Still think I can't marry you in red.

DAVID.

All day David waited for his answer. None came. He went out at night and walked on the cliff and saw the late moon rise shadowy and white over the cold sea, and caught the gleam

of the towers of Prue's home beyond the wood. He walked on, entered the grounds, and stood outside the lighted windows. He saw Prue in the firelight weaving a wreath of vivid red berries, and a bevy of girls stringing festoons of paper hearts to the chandeliers, and Strange hanging a faded tapestry over the balusters of the stairs. As he stood there, some one began playing the organ with masterly fingers—the strains of "The Rosary" throbbed and beat about him. He put up his hand to his nervous lips, and wheeled suddenly away from the windows. When he got back to the hotel, he asked the clerk if a letter had come for him.

The clerk yawned and shook his head.

The following morning he received a surprisingly friendly note:

DEAR DAVID: We're having a rehearsal at four to-day. Won't you suspend judgment until you know all the arrangements? I must get through with the rehearsal some way—daddy having made the appointment with the minister. It will be embarrassing if you fail me.

PRUE.

David went to the woods and floundered in drifts and tramped and smoked the morning hours away. Deep in his heart he realized that he was acting the part of an oaf. Prue, with her elfish yet wistful face, her dear big little-girl eyes, and her grown-up, wonderful smile, seemed to dance down the sun-flecked, dazzling snow path before him. She was trying to be fair. Well—why didn't she give up the red gown, then? She was tickling the vanity of Wallace Strange—the fop! David hated Strange. By noon he was in a black-storm mood. He tore a leaf from his notebook, wrote on it:

Let Strange act for me at rehearsal to-day,

carried it to the Delaigh grounds, and delivered it to the man at the lodge.

The hours lagged after that, but as four o'clock drew near, David entered the Delaigh grounds and stationed him-

self on the terrace outside the long French window opening into the great hall. The interior of the house was dimly lighted with candles, and he could peer through the parting between the heavy portières without fear of being seen. But when the sonorous organ tones pealed forth, he turned his back and looked out unseeing over the sheet of snow that was spread about him, and stood thus while some one sang "The Voice That Breathed O'er Eden."

When he turned and looked, after

petticoats, and bore huge shower bouquets of red geraniums. David drew in his breath. It was a dress rehearsal, then! He had not known that was customary. It did not look at all like a rehearsal, except for the absence of guests.

Just before the fireplace Strange met the bride, and David, watching, saw Prue's face grow chalk-white. Then, in another moment, the bridal party had grouped themselves, and the minister was facing them. Prue was staring at



"They've dressed me all in white, David."

an interval, Prue was coming down the dusky stairs between rows of scarlet geraniums, and the organ was playing the wedding march from "Lohengrin." She was a stately, old-time Prue—a Romney print come to life—in a quaint, long-sleeved red gown of filmy quality, with the light from the stained-glass window on her head, and the firelight flickering over her. A page in black velvet walked behind her, and a tiny flower girl tiptoed before her, carrying a gilt basket of geraniums. The bridesmaids wore white satin coats over red

the minister, and the bridesmaids were tittering, and Wallace Strange was looking uncomfortable. The minister expounded a line from his book and waited for Prue to answer. She did not speak, and a bridesmaid nudged her timidly. Still Prue did not speak, and the minister nodded to her encouragingly.

Suddenly she shrank back with an involuntary movement, cowered, and repulsed the man with the book, and whirled about so close to the leaping fire behind her that, in her ruddy gown,

she made a never-to-be-forgotten picture. Then the draft from the chimney sucked in the floating veil, and it curled up in a seething cloud of flame about the lovely, terrified face.

Her scream pierced the startled bridal party. Every one started forward wildly except Wallace Strange, who stood like a block, with ashen face, stammering. And then David, with a blow of his fist, crashed through the long French window, tore the portières from their rods, and threw the folds over the bride's head, crushing her against his breast.

It was all over in an instant. Prue lay unconscious in David's arms, with a big burn across her temple and her poor face blackened with soot and quite unrecognizable.

"Carry her to her room, David, my son," her father quavered, and David, brushing Strange aside, bore her swiftly away from the curious eyes of the bridesmaids.

A doctor came in due time, and David was turned out. He went to the sun parlor, sat down on the cement seat, and put his singed hands over his face. "Prue—my little girl—my little girl!" he groaned.

Perhaps an hour had gone by when some one touched him on the shoulder. It was the jaunty page in black velvet, with very unjaunty tear stains on his plump cheeks and a much-sooted coat.

"Prue wants to speak to you, David."

She wanted him! She was conscious, then! David took out his handkerchief and sobbed frankly before the astonished page. The page in his turn gulped. Prue was his sister, and if big David Bruce was not ashamed to give way to tears, perhaps it was not unseemly for him to display emotion. Then David looked up, and the lad saw that he was smiling faintly.

"Thank you, Bud," he said. "Will you come with me?"

A nurse waited outside Prue's door;

she stood aside and motioned them to enter. David took the lad's hand, and they tiptoed in together. A window was open, there was a soft cooing of pigeons outside on the roof, the room was very still. Prue lay on a couch against a heap of pillows; she had on a little white gown, and her poor face was gray and drawn beneath the bandage on her brow.

She held out her hand to David, and he rushed forward and laid his face against it. No word was spoken for a time; the pigeons cooed mournfully, and the little page snuffled uneasily.

"I've been bad—so bad to you, David!" whispered Prue.

"No, no!" David groaned, kissing her hand.

"They've dressed me all in white, David."

"Hush, oh, hush!"

"That wasn't a rehearsal we were having, David. I—I meant to marry Wallace Strange—to—to punish you! David! Don't look like that!"

David's face was as white as a dead man's. He only looked at her wildly. She put her other hand on his hair.

"Dear David, you wouldn't marry me in red—will you marry me now in white?"

David looked up with a wild appeal: "Oh, my darling—my darling! You're not going to die—my little Prue!" he cried, breaking down utterly.

The page dug his fingers into his eyes and gave a heartbreaking sob, and Prue lifted herself with an effort and looked at them curiously, the old elfish gleam in her eyes.

"Listen, you two—who said anything about dying? The doctor says I shall be quite fit in a day or two." She glanced at the man's haggard face, and her voice faltered. "I—I've dispensed with the circus-day parade, David, and—and the red gown, and—and I'm all in white, and—and the minister is waiting downstairs. Shall I have Bud bring him? I told daddy to have him wait."



FOOD AND FLORINDA

By
MARY HEDGES FISHER

ILLUSTRATED BY H. F. NONNAMAKER

TO the typical fluffy young thing who infests the downtown business section, the mention of "lunch hour" suggests not so much a respite from clicking typewriter keys and the repletion of the inner girl, as a chance for recreation and social intercourse; a time to promenade with one's lady friends along the crowded highway of Nassau Street, to gaze into the shop windows that cater to ladies' wear, to hearken unto the strains of Broadway's latest hit bawled from the windows of a Fulton Street song shop. It is idle to squander your sympathy on the girl who is driven from home to work downtown, for she is having the time of her life. Besides, she senses that all this business life is but an episode; in a year or two, or three, maybe, when her ship comes in, it will bring with it a young millionaire for her to marry, and her own limousine to drive. She once read in the paper of a stenographer who achieved that very thing, and what woman has done, woman may do.

But after one has kept on being a business girl for a slight matter of, say, twenty-five years, one's noonday hour has come to represent, only rest and food; just that and nothing more. Miss Florinda Barber, stenographer of uncer-

tain age, when she donned her hat every day at twelve-thirty by the Trinity clock, was more concerned with "Today's Specials," featured daily on the menu of the Delft Lunch Room—two doors east of William Street, one flight up—than with the latest war bulletin or a guaranteed hosiery sale at the Beekman Bazaar.

"Dessert?" queried her little blond waitress, before filling out the check, one bright September day.

Miss Florinda ordered two vanilla éclairs, her especial favorites, and made away with them even unto the last gooey morsel. Then, having paid her check, she slipped a dime under her tumbler, and waddled forth to the elevator, all unconscious of the sympathetic glances and deprecatory headshakings exchanged between the little blond waitress and the big brunet cashier.

"Ain't it dreadful—at her age—to be working?" exclaimed the one.

"Ain't it?" echoed the other.

Although it was Saturday, and a half holiday, Miss Florinda was returning to the office. Brooding with satisfaction upon the food she had just demolished, she felt content with the whole scheme of creation, the only cloud on her peaceful horizon being the very regrettable



In the act of placing a pink slip on top of its pile, Miss Florinda paused for the reply from Harry Carey.

circumstance that Mr. Carey, the head of the firm, had been confined to his home for several days past with an attack of gout. While it was true that his temper of late had been irascible, to put it mildly, nevertheless, only that morning Miss Florinda, presuming upon her privilege as the gentleman's private secretary, had conveyed to him through the agency of Jimmie, the office boy, a personal note of sympathy, along with an immense bouquet of flowers, culled from her brother's garden.

Miss Florinda hung up her hat, blew out the fingers of her white tisle gloves, exchanged her "far" glasses for the "near" ones, and, settling herself behind her desk in a secluded alcove, entered upon her self-allotted task of sorting miscellaneous order blanks.

Two hours before, "young" Mr. Carey had intimated that it would be a waste of time to fuss with them, inasmuch as the company had ordered a new issue to be ready the first of the month; but his father's stenographer, the day still vivid in her memory when "Baby Harry" had made his initial appearance at the offices of Carey & Co., clasping his nurse's finger with one hand and a grimy stick of candy with the other, preferred to exercise her own discretion in the matter of order

blanks, as well as in sundry other matters.

By and by, the door was heard to open from the outer corridor, but Miss Florinda did not trouble to look up, expecting no one but the janitor on his rounds to collect waste paper. Then the aroma of a cigar not unpleasantly struck her nostrils, and a moment later she recognized Mr. Spencer's voice. George Spencer, a classmate of Harry Carey's at Columbia, had recently entered the company as assistant advertis-

ing manager. In the opinion of Miss Barber, he was a pleasant-appearing young man, but, like most young men, somewhat too highly imbued with the sense of his own responsibility.

There followed the grating sound of opening roll-top desks.

"We're alone on deck," sang out young Spencer across the open office. "Mind if I smoke my pipe?"

Pipe smoking being taboo generally in the office, Miss Barber, out of consideration for the youths, deemed it best to remain undisclosed.

"Far as you like," returned Harry Carey. "Going out on the four-two?"

"Yes, if we can make it. I promised Helen we'd meet them at the golf club."

Silence for an hour or more, unbroken save for the scratching of pens, the rustling of papers. Then from George Spencer:

"How's the old man to-day?"

In the act of placing a pink slip on top of its pile, Miss Florinda paused for the reply from Harry Carey, which came in a tone far from optimistic.

"I'm rather uneasy about him, George. I called up the house this morning, and gathered from the nurse, Miss James, that he'd had a rotten night. She seems to think he ought to get out of the city, away from the humidity we've had here during the past few weeks."

Miss Florinda laid down the pink slip and sighed deeply, meanwhile registering the hope that her flowers had been placed in water and received with appreciation.

Then again, from the direction of young Spencer: "What's the prospects for his getting back to business?"

"It's impossible to say, George. It may be weeks, and it may be months. Of course, the climax was rheumatism, but father was all run down anyway, and ought to have laid off for a while a year ago. He's never got back his grip since mother died, and then my

getting married two years ago left the poor old chap pretty much alone. Grace and I have urged him time and again to come out and make his home with us, but he can't—or won't—see it. He spends his evenings more often than not at the club with a lot of high-living old cronies who never go home, I suspect, until every other place is closed up."

Miss Florinda looked marked disapproval, while the son's voice continued with ill-concealed anxiety:

"And yet I don't see just what I can do, for, after all, father is only sixty years old, not due for senile decay yet a while."

"Rather not!" This from George Spencer.

More pen scratching, then young Carey began with an air of unburdening his soul: "While we're discussing father's breakdown, George, I'll be frank in saying to you that I'm in no end of a quandary. I don't know whether I'm boss here or whether I'm not. Of course, father has been a wonderful business man, but he's got in a kind of a rut and lets the place run itself. But until I know he's retired for good, I can't launch out with any of my ideas."

"For instance?" encouraged his chum, while Miss Barber yearned to spank them both for their impertinence.

"Well, that mail-order department needs going over with a fine-tooth comb. Then the branch agencies in Chicago and San Francisco need a thorough overhauling, and right close at home in this very office— Well, this whole machine is clogged with deadwood; venerable derelicts dating from antebellum days."

A chuckle emanated from George Spencer's corner, and a single word, uttered with a rising inflection. Then Harry Carey caught the infection, and both young men succumbed to a paroxysm of merriment, while the lone eavesdropper in her alcove sat motionless,

clasping and unclasping her pudgy hands until the nails cut deep into the flesh. Only a single word spoken, but that word had been: "Florinda?"

"Well," rejoined Harry Carey, recovering his equilibrium, "you've said it—Florinda! Now, she's a good old soul, who would have made an excellent grandmother, but as a business proposition—she's punk. She's slow as mud, and as obstinate as a mule—or as the old woman she is—when it comes to adopting new methods. She'd be fine as the head of a welfare department, if we thought of starting one, but we could get a little girl fresh from business school to do double her work at half the salary. If I had my way, I'd pension her off and turn her out to grass in her brother's garden. The exercise would do her good."

"How old is she, anyway?" speculated young Spencer. What impudence!

"Search me. She's been here since a very young girl, and father says her hair turned white at twenty, so you can't tell by that. But isn't she a cute little thing? If we had two or three more of her bulk, we'd have to rent larger offices. Father always speaks of her highly—ideal secretary, fine woman, Christian influence over the younger employees, and so forth, and so forth. But when I take hold here—" He paused ominously.

"I get you," said the other lad, snapping his watch case. "Time for the four-two, Harry."

Whistling cheerily, the young men started for the elevator. The unfortunate target of their criticisms held her breath until there was no possibility of their coming back; then, brushing aside with a movement of despair all the neatly piled order blanks into one confused jumble, Florinda Barber pillowed her head in her arms and cried and cried. Gone forever was the mantle of complacency with which she had cloaked

the unwelcome burden of advancing years. What mattered it she was not so old as she looked? It was the age one appeared that counted in the business world, and in her moment of enlightenment was revealed to her the pitiful reason why so many of the downtown women tinted their cheeks, dyed their hair, struggled to retain a youthful outline, refused to grow old—however gracefully.

"I'm terribly fat!" mourned Miss Florinda, gazing down at the billows of flesh intervening between chin and feet.

And that very evening, inclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope for reply, she indited an appealing, letter to the beauty expert of a New York evening paper.

The following Monday morning, young Harry Carey, assembling the office staff, made it known to them in his most dignified manner that his father, in pursuance of the doctor's orders, had gone for an indefinite stay in the Adirondacks. Miss Barber retired to the washroom and wept bitter tears, for now, in comparison with this usurping little upstart who would control the destinies of all he surveyed, she recognized in her former employer a monument of benevolence, who conducted his business chiefly with an eye to the good of those serving him. How generous he had always been in time of trouble—how sympathetic—how interested in his meanest employee!

"I believe," she declared, with a sudden resolve, wiping her eyes, "I'll write him occasionally news about the people here; nothing about business, but just the chatty kind of letter I should like, if I were in his place."

As the weeks went by, with the changing administration, conditions in the office grew daily more uncongenial to Miss Florinda, in addition to the fact that the Spartanlike regimen of abstinence and exercise prescribed by the beauty expert had snatched away her

little remaining zest in life. The Delft Lunch Room knew her no more, her noonday refreshment now being restricted to three dry crackers and a walk in Battery Park. All this martyrdom in the forlorn hope of drawing her salary from Carey & Co. for a few years longer!

Early in December, the very morning that Miss Florinda had found it possible to take still another reef in her waistband, she had an unexpected summons from Sally Conroy, the deity presiding over the switchboard:

"Miss Barber! Lady on the wire!"

Miss Florinda hastened to the telephone booth; he it remarked that she was now able to hasten without knocking over chairs as she passed.

"Hello!" she faltered, fearful of bad news from Flatbush. Perhaps something had happened to Brother Fred—or the children?

"Miss Barber?" returned a strident and unfamiliar female voice. "This is Miss James talking—Mr. Carey's nurse. We're back in Sixty-ninth Street. Mr. Carey wants you to bring up your notebook and any letters unforwarded. Right away, please."

In his luxurious library, Henry Carey sat huddled before an open fire, a peevish expression on his haggard face, which, however, lighted up somewhat at



"If I had my way, I'd pension her off and turn her out to grass in her brother's garden. The exercise would do her good."

the entrance of his wind-blown secretary.

"Glad to see you," he said heartily, a puzzled look passing over his features. "Excuse my not rising. My nurse, Miss James—Miss Barber."

From her post by the window, a hatchet-faced young woman in crisp blue linen raised her eyes from her crocheting and acknowledged the introduction.

The stenographer loosened her wraps and made ready for dictation, while her

employer skimmed over his letters and selected a number requiring immediate answer. With the first phrases that dropped from his lips, in the old familiar diction, Miss Florinda's pencil fell into line, and the thought flashed through her mind that the present was the nearest she would ever approach to happiness. Oh, to set back the hands of the clock! Just to restore this man to his old-time courage and vigor, and his old-time post at the helm of Carey & Co., with her, his faithful factotum, at his elbow!

The minutes and hours flew by unnoticed. Some time during the morning the nurse had folded her work and tipped out of the room, but her departure was marked by never a ripple.

"This has seemed like old times, hasn't it?" said Mr. Carey at last, laying aside the correspondence. "No, don't run away yet," as she made a movement toward her hat. "I've got a lot of things to talk about while I have the chance. First, you've never been properly thanked for those flowers you sent me 'way back last fall. I've thought of them many times, when life hasn't seemed over cheerful. It was mighty good of you."

The secretary, embarrassed, murmured deprecatingly and inquired after his health.

"Me? Oh, so-so. The doctor says I could be well now if I made up my mind to it. To tell the truth, Miss Barber, I've felt more like myself this morning than in many months. Something in your sitting there, looking comfortable and contented, with your notebook and pencil and queer little pot-hooks— Well, I've forgotten for a while my aches and pains, liniments and pills. I wish you'd been following me around for the past ten weeks, instead of that estimable and tedious trained nurse."

Miss Florinda was so overcome that

she almost forgot to stand in awe of him.

"And those little notes that came to me all along the line—I didn't answer them, for my hand's just getting where it can hold a pen, but I don't want you to think they weren't appreciated. You're an awfully good woman, and an awfully good friend, Miss Florinda Barber. Sometimes," he mused, turning from her to look intently at the fire, "I wonder if you aren't the best friend I've got." Then he shrugged his shoulders, as one throwing off an ugly mood. "But tell me about yourself," he said. "Haven't you fallen off in weight? And what's come of your pink cheeks, young woman?"

The suddenness of the inquiry brought tears to the stenographer's eyes, and her employer's gaze became yet more searching.

"Look here," he demanded, with brusque kindness, "what's the matter? Family troubles? What then? How are they treating you in the office?"

His secretary gulped down the lump in her throat. "Things aren't the same without you, Mr. Carey."

"The old order changeth," he repeated slowly. "My boy Harry, with his eternal cry of efficiency! Efficiency! And last year's employees to the scrap heap. The establishment of Carey & Co. wasn't built up on any such policy. Miss Florinda, I'll put it up to you: Shall I stay out, or shall I come back?"

Miss Florinda's eyes sparkled, and her cheeks flushed. She would never be afraid of him any more.

"Mr. Carey," she cried, "if you only knew how I've prayed for your return! I've worried myself sick—"

"Is that why you've grown so thin?" he interrupted. "Worrying about me—a young, good-looking woman like you? I verily believe you grow young, instead of old, like the rest of us. Or is it because I've never really seen you before?"



"My dear friend," she heard his voice saying, as from far off, "since you took your place by my fireside this morning, it has been steadily growing on me that here's the very place I need you—in my home."

Miss Florinda stood before him, shaking a warning finger. "You're not old," she declared. "You're not even elderly; for there's a handful of youngsters itching to run your business like a get-rich-quick concern, and unless you come back and show them, they'll run it—clear into the ground!"

Henry Carey threw back his head and laughed loud and long. "All right," he acquiesced. "You win. I'll be there in the morning. Only you've got to brace me up when I feel it coming on that the game isn't worth the playing. Shake hands on it?"

They did so, but he seemed to forget to release her fingers. "My dear friend," she heard his voice saying, as from far off, "since you took your place by my fireside this morning, it has been steadily growing on me that here's the very place I need you—in my home. Won't you try me as a husband, instead of an employer? Of course"—and he wavered—"I may be selfish in urging you, and if I seem too old and broken down to marry——"

Florinda Barber flung herself down on the fur rug beside his chair, and pressed his wasted hand against her cheek. "We'll grow young together,"

she whispered. "Only—please hurry and get well!"

As she emerged from the subway some fifteen minutes later, despite all the happiness permeating her being, Florinda Barber was yet conscious of a gnawing sense of incompleteness, as of something lacking. Then her eyes caught sight of the clock on the Trinity tower.

"Why, certainly!" she exclaimed, stopping short on the sidewalk. Just an instant she hesitated, and—"Just this once," she said.

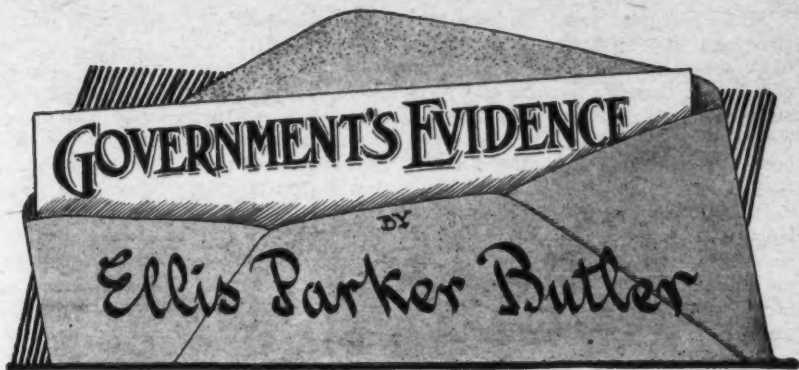
Two doors east of William Street, one flight up, the blue-tiled Delft Lunch Room awaited the return of the prodigal. Into her old familiar seat she sank, critically, almost anxiously, scanning "To-day's Specials," while the little blond waitress wondered at the prodigal's svelteness.

"Waitress," she began, "I'd like a chicken pie, some asparagus tips, sweet potatoes, French rolls, a pot of cocoa, and——"

"Dessert?" gasped the little waitress, leaning against the table.

"And two vanilla éclairs, the biggest you've got in the place. *I'm hungry!*" quoth Miss Florinda.





GOVERNMENT'S EVIDENCE

BY

Ellis Parker Butler

Author of "P. Gasey, \$4.00," "Beating Back for Laura," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY MAYO BUNKER

MAYBE you should get the stuff out from the window, Joe," said Mr. Schultz, pausing in his progress down his store, "and dress up the window new again, yes?"

His one clerk, seated on the edge of the shelving back of the cash register, looked up from his task of polishing his nails.

"All right," said Joe, "I'll get at it right away. Use some of those spring shirts?"

"Put in what you should want to, Joe," said Schultz kindly. "You could always make a nice-looking window. My wife, she has been in this morning?"

"Not yet," said Joe, closing his pocketknife with a click and dropping his foot from the counter. "I got a swell idea for that window, Mr. Schultz. I seen it on Broadway the last time I was over to New York. Shirts and socks—the same colorings put together. I don't put in a whole lot of stuff any more. Everything has got to be artistic nowadays, Mr. Schultz."

"Sure! I don't care how artistic is it so long as it fetches trade inside, Joe," said Mr. Schultz. "I remember how it was all æsthetic once. Now it

is all artistic. Well—business is business, just the same, whatever it is."

Joe laughed and began pulling shirt boxes from the shelves, choosing a shirt here and there, and matching them with socks. He had a rather poor opinion of Mr. Schultz and his business ability. Until Joe had come to help in the haberdashery—with clothing on the side—the place had "looked like a junk shop, you understand," and he was of the opinion that only his introduction of up-to-date methods had saved Mr. Schultz from bankruptcy. Joe had come to the suburb somewhat reluctantly, at a time when business was "rotten" in New York, and once installed in Schultz's shop, he had decided to become its owner some day.

There was a good chance of this, he imagined, for Schultz was constantly complaining of one pain or another. In fact, Schultz seemed to be preparing for the end of life, for he had joined one benefit association after another, until he seemed to belong to every one that would accept him. All the benefit associations he joined were in New York, and their meetings seemed to take most of his evenings, and he seemed loath to miss a single meeting. If Schultz

had been as young as Joe, his wife might well have suspected the haberdasher of some ulterior reason for wishing to take the rather tiresome trip to the city so often, but Schultz was the last man in Westcote any one would have suspected of gay Lotharianism.

Schultz was gray around the temples, and walked with a drag of the feet and a seeming weariness of all his bones. He stooped quite a little, and had a habit of clasping his hands behind his back when walking, and this made his stoop the more noticeable. He looked burned out, as if too strenuous toil in his early days had worn him down and had left only a weary shell of a man. There was truth in this, too, for the little haberdashery had had a hard struggle. Not until he was well past his prime had Schultz felt capable of supporting a wife.

Mrs. Schultz was much younger than her husband, and he seemed to be utterly devoted to her. Not a few of his gray hairs were due to his worry over the problem of how to keep Rosy well dressed and still meet his merchandise bills; and Rosy understood that the joining of so many benefit associations was in order that she need not feel want when Schultz passed beyond the realm of haberdashery.

"When anything should happen to me, Rosy," he said to her, "you should keep right on with the store, you understand. Joe could run it for you like I could, and maybe better, with a boy to help out. Haberdashery ain't so hard. Get what's swell while it is new yet, and close it out cheap if it starts in to get old on you."

"Oh, you live as long as I do," said Rosy. "You got a constitution like the old pump handle my brother Sam has got out to his farm—always squeaking, but it don't never break."

"Well, maybe I get into the United Monarchs of the Union, Number Sixty-six, yet, before the doctor finds how sick

I am," said Mr. Schultz. "That will be another three thousand for you, Rosy, anyway."

"Pshaw! You shouldn't talk like that!" she said. "I bet you plant a rose of Sharon by me first, yet, before I plant one by you."

Rosy was good looking and fine about the house. She said she liked the house to look as if real folks lived in it, and not like a pigsty, and she refused to have a maid, with all the trouble that Polak maids were. Mr. Schultz, when Joe had come out from the city, had suggested that, if they took him to board, his board money would pay the wages of a real maid—Irish or German; and Rosy had agreed that it would be a good idea to take Joe in and, if the added work was too much for her, the maid could be had later. But she never sent for the maid. In the summer she took Joe's accumulated board money and spent the hot months at Arverne, leaving her husband and Joe to wear the house to a condition resembling the "pigsty" she had once mentioned, and to get their meals at "Frank's."

On this particular day in the early spring, Mr. Schultz was worried by a problem that constantly presented itself. The bills for his spring goods and the time for buying new garments for Rosy had come simultaneously, and, as usual, his bank balance was low and his bank loan as large as the bank thought it should be. The Golden Eagle Neckwear Company was pressing for a payment on account; the note had to be renewed at the bank, and the interest paid; it was the thirty-first of the month, and Joe's wages were due; Mrs. Schultz was coming to the store for money with which to buy her spring dress in New York; and he had a balance of just fifty-three dollars and sixteen cents on which to draw. It was a constant source of wonder to Mr. Schultz where all the money he took in went. Rosy wondered, too, for the store



She put a hand on either side of Mr. Schultz's face and gave him a good, smacking kiss.

did a good business, but Schultz, when trying to enumerate for her benefit the expenses of his business, usually accounted for the odd sums not otherwise accounted for by saying: "And then I got so many dues to such benefit associations all the time." He never suspected Joe of speculation, and, if he had, he would have been doing Joe an injustice, for Joe never touched a penny not his own.

As Mrs. Schultz passed the window Joe was dressing, she tapped on the glass and smiled at him, and Joe returned the smile and nodded. She was in the pleasant mood of a woman bent on a shopping trip, and, as she entered the shop, she put a hand on either side of Mr. Schultz's face and gave him a good, smacking kiss.

"Well, papa!" she exclaimed. "I got my mind all made up after you come away from the house. I don't get a maroon dress, like I thought. Gray makes me look thinner, yet. I bet you don't know me in gray, I look so bony."

"You? Bony, Rosy?" said Schultz. "You should look bony! You look just right to me, whatever color you get it, a dress, I assure you. But gray is a good color this season. Ties and socks we have in gray more as you would believe. Gray is all right, Rosy. Joe says gray from the start, and Joe has got good taste. Joe is artistic like."

"Gray is fashionable. I should care what Joe says!" she said. "And now, papa, how much should I spend for a dress?"

"Well, how much should you need to spend?" he asked.

"Fifty dollars?" she queried, with a coy, hesitant tone.

Schultz turned away.

"I want you should look nice, Rosy," he said, walking to his desk and opening his check book. "Maybe you could for fifty dollars get a dress that would be good for spring and maybe part of the summer. Last summer, when you

were at Arverne, I had me a hard time raising the money for that blue dress with the what-you-call it on it. A man can't tell how business pans out. There! You could cash the check at the bank. Get what you want, Rosy. I make it a suggestion; I don't give it an order to you, you understand. Get what you want."

She gave him another kiss and folded the check into her purse.

"Anyhow," she said, "I get what I get with return privilege. Me, I don't have no alterations made until you see what I buy, papa. If it don't suit you, I send it back."

Her husband went to the door with her. He was proud of her. He thought she looked ten years younger than she was, and she was ten years younger than he. Again she tapped on the window, and again Joe nodded to her. Then she crowded back against the window to permit two big policemen to pass. Joe stopped his work to look out of the window, and Mr. Schultz remained in the doorway to watch the unusual spectacle. None of the three imagined that it had even the remotest connection with them or their lives.

The policemen were followed by a crowd of boys and men, and between them they led, handcuffed to them, a young man who, with his hat pulled over his eyes, tried to hide his face. Mr. Schultz put his head inside the door.

"That should be that postman that was arrested, Joe," he said. "He goes by the lockup to the jail. He was a fool, Joe."

"He ain't got a chance but he should be sent up for ten years," said Joe. "They got him with plenty of goods on him, from what I hear."

Mr. Schultz came inside and stood by the window, watching Joe work.

"Well, the haberdashery business ain't no Standard Oil business, Joe," he said, "but it ain't no business where a

man can get into bad trouble, either. I don't wish anybody any bad luck, but when one of these fellows goes wrong once in a while, I got some satisfaction that nobody ever gets a chance to say I ever done a piece of dirty work. A man what works so hard like I do, Joe, and keeps his nose to the grindstone all the time, and gets his bills paid, it ain't so long after they are due, and keeps up a house, and dresses a nice little wife like what Rosy is, ain't got time for crooked foolishness. A man could insure his place and have a fire, maybe, when somebody presses him too hard for a bill, but what is there in it? You get a couple of dollars, maybe, and go into your grave soon enough, feeling like a chicken stealer."

"That's right," said Joe.

"Look at this here post-office fellow, now," went on Mr. Schultz. "Maybe he don't got to worry about paying board no more, but what is there in it? For a little while, while he is stealing regular, he lives like a king, they tell me—girls and taxicabs and swell restaurants all the time—and now what? Ain't it a shame? Instead of marrying a girl that could keep his house clean for him, he goes fooling with a girl, all she cares is he should spend money on her, and he gets the penitentiary in the neck."

"Well, if he gets it, he had it coming to him, I guess," said Joe. "Over three hundred letters they found on him, they tell me."

"Such a fool!" said Schultz. "Keep-ing the letters by him all the time! It shows how crazy he was, Joe. You leave the girls alone, Joe, until you get fixed to marry one, you understand? It should kill a man, almost, the worry he has when one of them vampire women gets a hold of him. Stealing letters is nothing to what he should have to do for her. Murder he will do sometimes and then what? He should kill himself, maybe."

"I guess you've got that right," said Joe. "Step outside and let me know how this looks from in front. I don't know is it better to put the shirts straight across or in a ring, sort of."

Mr. Schultz stepped outside. He was motioning to Joe to move the shirts farther apart when Postmaster Higgins stopped at his side and placed a hand on his arm.

"Mr. Schultz?" he asked.

"I'm Mr. Schultz," said the haberdasher. "What could I do for you?"

"I'm Postmaster Higgins," said the postmaster. "I want to talk to you for a minute or two. Something important."

"I'm glad I should know you, Mr. Higgins," said Mr. Schultz, extending his hand. "I understand from the paper already you got the appointment, and I say to Joe: 'Who he is I don't know, but——'"

"Yes," said the postmaster brusquely. "But we'll talk about that later. I'm going to try to give this part of New Jersey a little better postal service, but I haven't got the ropes of the office fairly in my hands yet. Now, where can we talk a little in private?"

"Come in," said Schultz, and he led the way to the back of the shop. The small office, used also as a fitting room for those who bought trousers, was in one corner of the rear of the shop, and Mr. Schultz led the way into it and closed the door. Postmaster Higgins pulled a chair close to Mr. Schultz's desk and seated himself. He put his hand in his pocket and drew forth a heavy envelope. He placed the envelope on the desk before him.

"You know that one of my carriers has been arrested for taking letters from the letter boxes?" he said.

"Sure I know it, but if it is bail I should be asked to give for him, the answer is, No! I don't give bail for nobody I don't know, and not for a fellow that maybe would skip out on



None of the three imagined that it had even the remotest connection with them or their lives.

me and I should put another mortgage on my house and——”

“You’re on the wrong track, Mr. Schultz,” said the postmaster. “There is a letter box down here on the corner.”

“I should know it,” said Mr. Schultz. “I seen it enough times. But how should this fellow get mail out of that letter box, Mr. Higgins? His route ain’t here at all. He goes out by Parkinson Avenue, yet, and down by the slaughterhouse they tell me.”

“He went wherever he pleased, when he was taking letters,” said Higgins. “He had a key. He took letters from

one box one day, and from another box another day. He got two of your letters from the box on the corner. He had two of them in his room when we searched it.”

“So?” said Mr. Schultz slowly. His eyes were fixed on the postmaster’s face, for the postmaster seemed to be making a mystery of the affair, or if not a mystery, at least something secret and to be hidden, if possible. Mr. Schultz let his eyes fall. “Well,” he said, “what you should want to tell me about it, Mr. Higgins?”

The postmaster took up the large envelope and looked inside it. He drew forth an envelope, smaller and unpostmarked, but opened by a slit along one

end. In one corner it bore the business card of Mr. Schultz:

JOSEPH SCHULTZ,
Haberdasher and Fine Clothing,
875 Hollowell Avenue,
Westcote, New Jersey.

The postmaster laid the envelope before Mr. Schultz, and the haberdasher took it in his hand and looked at it. There was no expression on his face whatever; neither surprise nor recognition nor shame nor amusement. He merely looked at the envelope.

“That’s one of them,” said the post-

master. "I brought them around to show you, because you can get back the money that was stolen if you will make an affidavit that the money was in the letter when it was mailed. The fellow's bondsmen have to make that good, but we must have the affidavit. That one"—the postmaster looked at the envelope to make sure—"had ten dollars in it, I imagine."

Mr. Schultz turned the envelope over and looked at the back of it. Then he slowly drew the folded sheet of letter paper from the envelope and opened it and laid it on his desk.

The letterhead was the one used by him in his business correspondence. The same name—"Joseph Schultz"—was spread across the top of the sheet, and there was more printing than on the envelope. The letterhead not only told that he was a haberdasher in general and a dealer in fine clothes, but it mentioned various well-advertised articles for which he was agent. Mr. Schultz read the letter through slowly. He read it twice.

The letter was to Rosy, and it was dated the previous September, just before the cool weather had driven Rosy home from Arverne. It ran:

DEAR ROSY: I got your letter, and, if I can, I will come down again over Sunday, for it is plenty lonely in the house with you away. I get so I could hardly wait until the end of the week to see you. I guess I love you better every day than I did yesterday. I could not stand it if I did not know you love me like I do you. Business is rotten. I could wish I was a millionaire, so I could spend a couple of million on you, but I inclose ten dollars, anyway, because I know you ain't got enough money to have a good time like I should want you to have, even if I ain't there. Enjoy yourself, Rosy, but don't forget

YOUR SWEETHEART AT 875.

"Well?" said Mr. Schultz, pushing the letter from him.

"You can get that ten dollars back, anyway," said the postmaster. "And maybe you want to get this twenty back, too."

He handed Mr. Schultz the other envelope. Mr. Schultz glanced at the postmaster's face as he took the envelope. His hand trembled a little as he read the address. The envelope was addressed to "Miss Vera Swiftliss," at a number on a none-too-respectable street in New York. Mr. Schultz placed the envelope to one side and unfolded the letter. Again the letterhead of the store fronted him. He read the letter in the same slow manner in which he had read the first. By no possible contortion of the mind could this letter be construed as a letter to a wife:

MY OWN LITTLE GIRLY: I inclose the twenty dollars I said last night I'd send it to you, and to-morrow night I go to New York again and you should meet me at the Lackawanna Ferry. Wear it the new hat you spoke of that the twenty dollars is for, and we go to the theater or somewhere, because I can't see you Sunday next on account of business.

"Now, all you have to do," said the postmaster, "is to come up to the office with me and swear to an affidavit that you put the money in those letters, and you'll get the money back."

"And I should get the letters back, too?" asked Mr. Schultz. He asked it eagerly.

The postmaster shook his head and smiled.

"And if I should make no bother about that thirty dollars," said Mr. Schultz slowly, "you give me the letters?"

"Can't do it!" said the postmaster. "These letters are government's evidence. Perhaps these are the very letters the United States attorney will use to convict the man on. I can't give up any of the letters, but I had to give you a chance to claim the money if you wanted to. You wrote them, didn't you?"

Mr. Schultz seemed to droop down in his chair. In the few minutes he had spent reading the letters, he had grown ten years older, and now, as he saw in

imagination the courtroom crowded with eager listeners, and the United States attorney reading the two letters to the jury, cold beads of perspiration stood on his forehead. He trembled with a nervous chill and shook as he drew his handkerchief from his pocket to wipe his face. He was a pitiful sight.

The postmaster had imagined there might be something amusing in confronting the man with the two letters, although it was his duty to bring the matter to the man's attention and not a mere whim; but there was nothing amusing in this broken old man, trembling in a cold sweat of fear.

"It could be I wrote this one," said Mr. Schultz, placing his shaking hand on the letter to Rosy, "and not this one."

"No," said the postmaster. "You couldn't find a man in America that would be fool enough to believe it. Those two letters— Why, look at them! The handwriting is absolutely the same, the ink is the same, the pen used was the same. No, you couldn't make any one believe that, Mr. Schultz. The question is whether you want to get the thirty dollars or not. All you have to do is to come up to the office and swear—"

The postmaster was rather scornful now. He did not think very highly of a man who would, at the age of Mr. Schultz, run after petticoats or buy hats—however innocently—for Veras; but for a man of years to play the gay boy and then fall into a blue funk at the first chance of exposure was sickening.

"If I do, everybody knows it, and if I don't, everybody knows it!" said Mr. Schultz dejectedly. "I get my name in the papers, maybe, and everybody laughs at me, and I got to move from town. And Rosy—"

There came a tapping on the glass door.

"Papa, can I come in?" said his wife's voice.

Mr. Schultz hurriedly moved a cash book over the two letters. He arose, trying to still his trembling.

"Come in!" he said, and she swung open the door, stopping, surprised, but smiling, as she saw the postmaster.

"I didn't know you had company, papa," she said. "Go on with your business, you! I don't want nothing. I missed my train and I go in by street car. Papa!" she exclaimed suddenly. "How you look! Are you sick, maybe?"

"No, no! I feel fine, Rosy. I get a sort of shock just now. I—I get word I don't get in the United Monarchs of the Union, Number Sixty-six, after all. I can't pass such an examination like they want. Go on, Rosy. Don't miss your car. Get a nice dress. I should be all right again in a minute."

"Sure?" she asked. "I could go to-morrow—"

"No, no! I want you should get the dress to-day. I want you should look fine, Rosy. I want people should think fine of you. Good-by!"

She drew him outside the office and closed the door.

"It ain't somebody should come to collect from you and you ain't got it the money, papa?" she whispered questioningly. "I could wait plenty easy. You could have it this fifty dollars. I ain't in no such rush, papa."

"No, Rosy," he said, putting his hand on her shoulder. "I get me thirty dollars in a few minutes I don't expect to get at all. Go now!"

She went down the shop with a swishing of her narrow skirts, waving a merry farewell to Joe as she passed his window, and Mr. Schultz reentered his office. He took his coat from a hook on the wall and drew it on. He found his hat and placed it on his head.

"All right, Mr. Higgins," he said. "I come up and make such an affidavit in a minute or two. It ain't such a nice piece



In the few minutes he had spent reading the letters, he had grown ten years older.

of business, having that twenty-dollar letter get all over town, but"—he threw up his hands and shrugged his shoulders—"a man, when he gets old, he is a bigger fool, if he is a fool, than a young fool. You go ahead, Mr. Higgins, and I come right away. I got I should tell Joe how I want my window finished up."

The postmaster gathered up the letters and placed them back in their envelopes, and returned the envelopes to the larger one. He put them safely in-

side his pocket, and went out of the office. For a minute old Schultz stood with his head bowed and his arms hanging limply. Then he sighed.

"Rosy! Rosy!" he said. "That you should fool an old fellow like me! Always I should be as good to you as I know how; always I should spend on you more than I could afford it; always I should be joining societies and societies and societies for death benefits for you, Rosy, and you should be treating me like this."

He seemed to be talking to himself, but his eyes were on the photograph thumb-tacked to his pigeonholes—a photograph of Rosy, taken at Rockaway Beach, with the saucy hat of the last summer and the forty-seven-fifty suit he had hardly been able to pay for.

"So!" he said bitterly. "Such a business is it comes from an old man thinking he could to marry a young woman and make her happy enough! For it I could to throw you out of the house and slam you into the gutter yet. All I should do is sit still and tell the truth who wrote those letters, and then what? But I don't do it, Rosy. No, I ain't such a chicken thief as that yet. A man, his reputation that way it don't count for so much as a woman's does. First, I should look out for your reputation, Rosy. And after——"

He made the hopeless upward gesture with his hands.

Joe was stepping out of the window, brushing his hands together to remove the dust from them, when Mr. Schultz, looking very old and broken, reached the front of the store.

"Mr. Schultz, believe me," said Joe. "I got it there one of the nicest artistic windows I ever saw in my life."

"Well, Joe," said Mr. Schultz wearily, "artistic ain't everything when you come right down to it. Who is this Vera What-you-may-call-her you've been writing letters to?"

Joe's face reddened.

"Mr. Schultz," he said, "I give you my word she's a girl anybody would be proud——"

"You shouldn't go to writing love letters on the business stationery, Joe," said Mr. Schultz. "Somebody might find such a letter and think the boss wrote it, and a nice business could come of it! Put on your hat and coat. I want you to go an errand for me."

Mr. Schultz stood waiting at the open door while Joe donned his hat and coat.

"All right! What is it?" asked Joe, when they were outside.

Mr. Schultz took the store key from his pocket and turned it in the lock. He did not so much as glance at the artistic shirt window. He looked Joe full in the face.

"I got me back from the postmaster just now one of those nice letters you wrote to Rosy by Arverne last summer, Joe," he said. "By rights I should maybe kill you for it, but I don't. I give you an errand for it instead. You should go by New York, to Mannheimer & Wirtz's, where Rosy goes for a dress, and ask her should she stay by me yet or go with you. If she stays by me, she should be welcome and I say nothing about nothing, you understand. If she goes with you, I don't want to see her no more. And I don't want to see you no more, anyway."

He turned away in the direction of the post office, leaving Joe standing with a ghostly white face. Mr. Schultz took ten steps and then turned.

"Joe!" he called, and Joe hesitated. "If you don't find Rosy by Mannheimer & Wirtz's," said Mr. Schultz, "maybe she don't find what suits her there, and goes by Fogelman Brothers. They got a dress sale to-day, too."

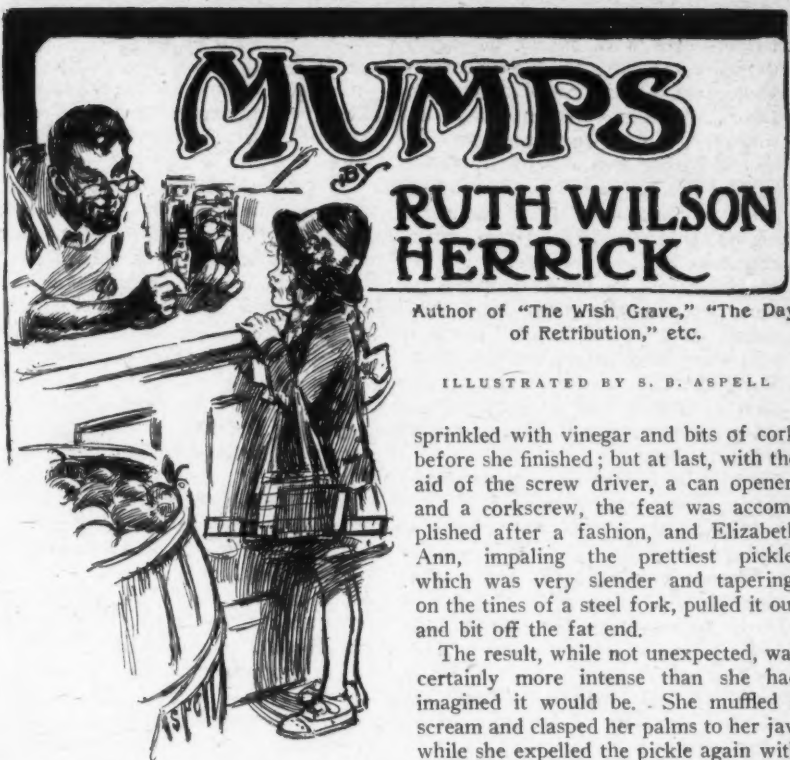
It was after she had selected a gray dress at Mannheimer & Wirtz's and had been met there by Joe that Rosy dropped into a seat on the four-fifteen train for Westcote.

"My!" said Mrs. Rosenheim, in the next seat. "You do look tired, Mrs. Schultz. Ain't shopping awful hard work?"

"Yes, Mrs. Rosenheim," said Rosy wearily. "I never was so glad to get home as I will be to-day. A good husband is a fine thing, Mrs. Rosenheim."

"Sure!" said Mrs. Rosenheim. "And you got one of that kind, Mrs. Schultz."

"Yes, *Gott sei dank!*" said Rosy.



MUMPS

RUTH WILSON HERRICK

Author of "The Wish Grave," "The Day of Retribution," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY S. B. ASPELL

ELIZABETH ANN rolled the last penny out from her money box into her open palm and went over to the grocery store to buy a dill pickle.

"You haven't any!" she repeated after the grocery clerk, presenting a worried and flushed little face just over the edge of the counter. Then her agitation cleared, and she tied her penny again into the corner of her handkerchief. "You may give me," she ordered, with composure, "the smallest bottle of mixed pickles that you have, and charge it to mother."

With her purchase in her hand, she went back home to apply the test. It was not an easy task to open the bottle. Indeed, the kitchen table was liberally

sprinkled with vinegar and bits of cork before she finished; but at last, with the aid of the screw driver, a can opener, and a corkscrew, the feat was accomplished after a fashion, and Elizabeth Ann, impaling the prettiest pickle, which was very slender and tapering, on the tines of a steel fork, pulled it out and bit off the fat end.

The result, while not unexpected, was certainly more intense than she had imagined it would be. She muffled a scream and clasped her palms to her jaw while she expelled the pickle again with haste and indignation. Tears welled up in her eyes and rolled down the valleys between her round cheeks and her nose with the suddenness of a spring freshet, and hurriedly, groping her way around tables and chairs that seemed floating down the flood, Elizabeth Ann sought her own room, and, shutting the door, cast herself upon the bed.

An hour later her mother, approaching the open door, was halted by a command from within:

"Don't come in. Have you got the baby there?"

"No," answered Mrs. Gale, opening the door immediately. "Why?"

Elizabeth Ann sat stiffly upright upon the edge of a straight chair, waiting, a look of deepest sorrow upon her face,

and a pink silk stocking tied around her head under her chin. She knew that a stocking was the accepted article of application in such a case as hers, but, shrinking from the thought of an ebony-hued one in such close contact with her face, she had substituted a pair of her dancing hose.

"I've got the mumps," Elizabeth Ann announced. "And I don't want the baby to catch them."

"What makes you think you have the mumps?" questioned her mother incredulously.

"I ate a pickle," her daughter explained. "And I took my temperature. It was one hundred and ten."

"One hundred and ten! Why, child, you'd be dead!"

"If I was dead," murmured Elizabeth Ann plaintively, "I wouldn't have any fever at all."

Mrs. Gale felt of the child's cheeks. They were, indeed, hot, and her eyes looked a trifle too bright.

"How do you feel?" asked her mother, in search of symptoms.

"Very badly," sighed Elizabeth Ann, holding her head stiff and rolling her eyes instead to see what preparations would be made for this emergency.

"You get undressed and into bed," commanded Mrs. Gale, turning down the bedclothes. "And I'll go down and call the doctor. It doesn't seem—What made you think of mumps, Elizabeth Ann?"

"Children often have them," replied Elizabeth Ann primly, as she pulled her braids around in front so that she could unbutton the back of her dress. "Of course, though, I wasn't sure until I ate the pickle."

It was not at all unpleasant to reflect that the doctor was coming. He was the dearest old man that ever slipped a cool thermometer under a little girl's hot tongue, and on warm days he came on horseback, wearing a linen suit and a white china silk shirt with pearl studs.

His hair, under his wide panama hat, was iron-gray, and his eyes were deep and full of understanding, as they looked down on a small person lying sick in bed. Sometimes, if he were not too busy, he stayed long enough to tell a few old war stories, which always added fresh glamour to the little bronze G. A. R. button he wore in his coat lapel, and to the slight limp in his walk, which was the result of an old wound.

Yet, experienced physician that he was, it was evident that Doctor Courtney, too, was puzzled over the diagnosis of his patient's case.

"Tell me again, Elizabeth Ann," he urged, "just how it felt when you ate the pickle. Did it make a sudden pain down here under your jaw and below your ear?"

"Yes," agreed the small person in bed, sniffing the delicious smell of antiseptics on the hands that gently massaged her neck. "And it smarted. The tears rained down my cheeks."

"Smarted! Hm!"

Elizabeth Ann subjected the mystified old doctor to a close scrutiny as he drew his grizzled eyebrows together to read the thermometer, whose mercury he had shaken into place with several quick little snaps of his wrist. Elizabeth Ann loved to see him do that, and she received the small glass stick into her mouth and held it gingerly with her teeth—lest she should bite into it by mistake and swallow the death-dealing contents—wearing all the time a look of complacent resignation.

"She seems a little thin," admitted Doctor Courtney to Mrs. Gale, feeling doubtless that an admission of some sort was needed. "Has she been feeling well?"

"Why, so far as I know. Haven't you, Elizabeth Ann?"

Elizabeth Ann gave a protesting gurgle and pointed to her thermometer. Why did doctors and dentists always fill a person's mouth with the parapher-

nalía of their trade and then ask questions?

"No, I have been poorly for some time," was her startling reply, when the obstruction was finally removed. "And I have lost two pounds."

"How is her appetite? Does she eat well?"

Elizabeth Ann turned suddenly scarlet and glanced at her mother covertly as the good lady answered, with all innocence:

"Why, yes, Doctor Courtney. She seems perfectly ravenous at times for her supper. Of course, she takes her lunch to school. We have to have dinner at one o'clock for Mr. Gale. But I always plan to have something hot and nourishing for her at night to offset her cold lunch."

"Why does she take her lunch? Isn't there time for her to come home to dinner?"

"No, you see we live out too far. She takes the car to school, and they run only every twenty minutes. She can't make connections, with such a short noon hour."

"She has a degree or so of fever," mused Doctor Courtney—with-out seeming properly disturbed by it, Elizabeth Ann thought. "Her imagination might bring that up."

"Do you think it is mumps?"

"It doesn't act like it, exactly. There are none about just now, either. Still, she seems a little run down, and it won't hurt her any to stay in bed for a few days till we see if she picks up."

He gave the small patient a last, perplexed look as he went out of the door, and a few seconds later Elizabeth Ann heard the gallop of his horse's hoofs dying away, fainter and fainter, on the brick pavement as he rode back toward town.



"I've got the mumps," Elizabeth Ann announced. "And I don't want the baby to catch them."

Twilight fell, and Callie brought up Elizabeth Ann's supper on a white-covered tray with the best gold china adorning it. There was a round bowl of broth and a small mound of jelly on a butter plate, and some thin white bread-and-butter sandwiches. Elizabeth Ann, with a wearied gesture, piled up her two pillows and leaned back against them, feeling and looking very much of an invalid. Callie, however, was overheard to observe to Mrs. Gale, when she took down the tray, that she "didn't think dat chile was very sick. She done licked her bowl clean;" which unfortunate remark marred a trifle the otherwise perfect enjoyment of Elizabeth Ann's evening.

All the next day the patient kept her bed, carefully isolated from baby brother, still eating quite abundantly, however, and making the most of the occasion in numerous ways. Then, at evening, mother, coming into the room, shut the door, and Elizabeth Ann, looking up suddenly, saw that the lightning was about to strike.

"Elizabeth Ann, your teacher just called up to inquire about you."

No answer from Elizabeth Ann.

"I told her we were hoping to make other arrangements for you so that you would not have to take a cold lunch to school." She paused a moment for effect. "And do you know what she told me, Elizabeth Ann?"

A very guilty face moved to and fro negatively on the pillow.

"She told me that you had not been taking your lunch to school for several months."

Elizabeth Ann tried her best to look surprised.

"Is that true?"

"Why, I do take my lunch," protested the small daughter, with an aggrieved tone. "You see me take it, mother, every morning. Callie always puts it up."

"Do you eat it at school?"

"Miss Campbell always goes right home," the defendant parried. "What does she know about it, I'd like to know?"

"Do you eat your lunch at school, Elizabeth Ann?"

"Do you know what other girls take their lunch to school?" Elizabeth Ann expostulated suddenly, sitting up in bed. "There's Mamie Peterson, whose father runs a saloon; and there's Zoe Foote, who's almost half-witted; and there are two little colored girls who live down in Tennessee Town. All my chums go home to dinner—Bess Salisbury and Marguerite—all of them."

"But they live downtown, dear," reminded her mother, more gently.

"I wish I did, too!" cried Elizabeth Ann, lying down again. "Just because I live on a hill out at the edge of town—even if it is a 'beautiful place'—why must I be different from every one else and take a horrid lunch box and eat with—those 'girls! And after lunch there's a whole hour that I had to spend with them." She stopped effectively at this climax.

"Had I!" repeated Mrs. Gale, after her. "Then you don't do it any more?"

She rubbed a troubled forehead.

"Why—yes, of course," replied Elizabeth Ann, after an instant's hesitation.

"You're telling me the truth, Elizabeth Ann?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Miss Campbell said she never sees you bring your lunch any more."

"There are lots of things Miss Campbell doesn't see," observed her pupil sagely.

"But you're still eating your lunch at school?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Mrs. Gale gave up the cross-examination. But poor Elizabeth Ann! Generation after generation of New England ancestors and *Mayflower* forefathers had handed down to her that ruthless, Puritan conscience which now woke like



"She has a degree or so of fever," mused Doctor Courtney—without seeming properly disturbed by it, Elizabeth Ann thought.

a slumbering dragon and proceeded to spit forth the fire that sears the soul.

"You lied! You lied!" it hissed, and reared itself upright in the pitch blackness of the night to stare with ferocious eyes at the little girl who carried a stain on her heart. Elizabeth Ann shrank down under the covers into her pillow, pulled the sheet around her ears, and trembled. She could stand it no longer.

"Mother!"

She had sat up suddenly in bed.

"Mother!"

The call was more desperate.

"Mother! Mother!"

Then mother came, and the dragon vanished. Elizabeth Ann was humped in the middle of her couch, weeping copiously and pleading for forgiveness.

"I lied," she wailed in a tempest of tears. "I haven't taken my lunch to school for weeks and weeks and weeks."

"Why, where do you eat it?" Mrs. Gale cried, not yet fully recovered from the hasty summons.

"I don't eat it," moaned Elizabeth Ann, crying louder. "I give it to a little brown dog who lives on the corner by

the car line. He eats the sandwiches and cold meat, and I eat the apple on my way up the block to school."

"But, child——"

"There's no place for me to eat it," protested the child, anticipating her mother's thought. "I won't eat at school any more. They all laugh at me for eating with those girls, and for carrying a lunch box like a day laborer. I can't eat it anywhere else without being seen, so I give it to Brownie, and hide the lunch box in the bushes until I take the car home after school."

"Elizabeth Ann! And you've eaten no lunch all these weeks?"

"No'm!" with sobs.

"You've been eating only two meals a day!"

"Yes'm," with a fresh storm of weeping. "There wasn't anything else to do about it. Father has to have dinner at one o'clock——"

"There is something to do about it," declared her mother, "if we have to get that runabout a few months earlier, so that father can take you down to school again when he goes back. How would you like that? But where have you been going at noon, Elizabeth Ann?"

Elizabeth Ann stopped crying and drew a long breath.

"Over to the library," she breathed rapturously. "In the children's room there are the loveliest books!"

Mrs. Gale sat silent in the dark, smoothing Elizabeth Ann's soft hair.

"The loveliest books!" murmured Elizabeth Ann sleepily, enjoying the gentle movement of her mother's hand. "Only sometimes I get too hungry to forget about it. I've been reading about

the Barneys, a big family of children that all had the mumps at once——"

"The mumps! Was that what put it into your head?"

"I did feel badly," insisted Elizabeth Ann. "My head ached and my throat was sore and my face was hot."

"My poor little girl!" murmured mother sympathetically.

Elizabeth Ann drew another long breath and cuddled her head down on her mother's shoulder. They sat silently in the dark for a long time. Then Mrs. Gale started. But what of the pickle? Why should that have hurt the child so?

There was no use in discussing it tonight, however. Elizabeth Ann had dropped to sleep, her conscience clear and her heart happy with the thought of future joys.

But in the morning the first thing came Doctor Courtney—with an idea!

"Let's see that pickle bottle of Elizabeth Ann's," he suggested.

Callie brought it in, wiping it off on her apron.

"See here," said Doctor Courtney briskly. "What was the pickle like that you ate, Elizabeth Ann?"

Elizabeth Ann examined the contents with interest.

"It was like that one," she said, pointing. "That pretty, red one, so nice and long and thin."

Mrs. Gale gave a half-hysterical laugh and then a sigh of despair as she reflected upon the agitations of the past thirty-six hours. The old doctor ran his hand through his hair and chuckled.

"Oh, Elizabeth Ann!" despaired her mother. "That kind isn't to eat. It's just put in for seasoning. It's a red pepper."



The Torch in the Mist

A TWO-PART STORY—PART II,

By Constance Skinner

Author of "Give Hand and Follow," "A Man and His Mate," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY E. C. CASWELL

CHAPTER VII.

CYNTHIA paid little attention to her mother's interrogations of Barbara. She was too much occupied with her own feelings. Chaos reigned in her. While listening to Ulrick, she seemed to have discovered with a rush—suddenly, stunningly, overpoweringly—that her whole life had been a blank, as far as individuality was concerned. She took sugar and cream in her tea because her mother had given her her first tea in this form. Even now most of her dresses were blue, because her mother had always dressed her in blue, and had decided to the last detail how the dresses should be made. It had been the same with everything. Her mother had ruled her absolutely in mind and body up to this day.

Cynthia remembered times of brief rebellion in her childhood, when she had felt a sense of suffocation, and, as if for her life, had foamed and fought against some maternal law like a frenzied thing, only to be broken into a meeker submission than ever by that merciless will. Not the least of her anguish had been the inevitable aftermath of her mother's fury—the woeful dissertations on the ingratitude and heartlessness of children, who forced every sacrifice upon a mother, and enjoyed all the fruits of it, yet refused the simplest return of loyalty and obedience.

The physical pangs had passed quickly enough; the terrors of the dark closet, the fears and irksomeness of the playless hours of isolation in the attic, these had melted with the release of her small body into the sunshine of family intercourse again—and the smile of a mother who was so beautiful when she smiled. But the mental slavery had never passed. For Cynthia was very literal. She never confused the primary colors, or misstated gray as black, or yellow as white. She was too literal herself to see that others were far from possessing her own verbal and mental exactness. She never realized that there was such a thing as temperamental exaggeration, or that it was merely domestic histrionism which was expressed in the flashing eye and the fine and terrible gesture.

They say that the dying relive the panorama of life in a moment, and that often some forgotten, uncomprehended event stands out as the pivot of all the rest. Cynthia Under-the-thumb was dying, her motion-picture film of bondage was reeling out before her, and its pantomimic overemphasis began to look ridiculous and tawdry. She saw the day when the close childish intimacy between herself and Barbara had ceased, and how they had grown apart, each into her own reserve, until this day when they were strangers and could be antagonists.

Cynthia had been nearly twelve and

Barbara nine when, after some childish error had brought on them the usual woe, there had come to the elder sister the resolve to make a penitential sacrifice, in some measure at least comparable to those maternal sacrifices with which Mrs. Cato had barred herself voluntarily from some Hans Andersen fairy state of wondrous good things to remain merely their suffering, slaving mother. So she and Barbara had decided to die.

There was a creek that ran through the woods at the edge of the little old town. In the high tide of spring the water would be over their heads. They would tell no one about it, but when the freshet came, instead of going to school, they would go down, hand in hand, and walk out into the water until it drowned them. Cynthia, being a little the taller—it was before Barbara had shot up past her—was to bend her knees when the water was over Barbara's head, so as to be extinguished at the same time as her younger sister. Also, Barbara had stipulated for a Monday morning, because their souls would have a better chance with God immediately after two church services and an afternoon of Sunday school. They had both said that Ledyard was too young to be invited to join the pact, but each knew that her secret and real reason for exempting him was that she loved her handsome little brother too much to endure the thought of his destruction.

Before the spring flood came, Mrs. Lee had married Mr. Cato, and the family had moved to La Prière. There had been no creek in La Prière. The only mode of departure from the flesh seemed to be the railroad track. It was a roaring and frightsome way; and, to reach it, they must traverse a mile or so of pasture in which were violent cows that sometimes chased people. Besides, beautiful mother seemed happier now that she had their new

father, even though she had married him only for their sakes. They had urged this last aloud. The cows had never been mentioned; but, in their hearts, they had known that the cows were the real barrier to sacrifice.

Their heroism had failed; they were cowards, and they understood the origin of that shameful word! They were ashamed of themselves and of each other; terribly ashamed that, having found out what paltry things they were, they could yet endure to live. Their shame had built a wall between them. They had sought the society of other children in play hours—children whose eyes had not said: "I know you, you cow-ard!" They had realized nothing of all this, it had been instinctive; but the wall had been there. So they had grown up strangers. How completely strangers Cynthia had discovered, with a shock, at Mr. Harmon Partridge Sample's impromptu luncheon. This shock did its part in awakening her from her long sleep.

She heard her mother's questions and Barbara's answers. She noted her sister's nervous, excited look, which she was evidently trying to carry off as enthusiasm, and felt convinced that Barbara was telling untruths. The conviction came to her like a chill. What apprehension of life was Barbara screening with a lie? Cynthia began to be much afraid of life, which had been handed to her like a cup of tea, sugared and creamed to her mother's taste, and which she had drunk, unquestioning.

And while she shrank from the suggestion of Barbara's untruthfulness, she knew that she, also, had been untruthful—at least, unfrank. She had not told her mother that she was tremulous with the hope and the sweet fear that the cup of life, which she had drunk in blind obedience, was even now working out in her life's own law, namely, creation. She had meant to tell her that very day. It had been to make

this confidence that she had ordered the limousine out into the park, where all spring was honoring the law in pæans of beauty, and all earth was lyrical with young light. She had felt vaguely that this was the moment when all the yearning and silent striving of her childhood and girlhood must attain its aim, that now her mother would open her arms and soul to her, as she had never done, and say that at last her daughter's debt was canceled in the joy of this possibility.

Thereafter, surely, there would be a tender communion between them, a real understanding, such as Cynthia had dreamed of as chief among things to be asked of the fairy's wand. Her mother would see that something different, something better and closer, must come about between herself—Cynthia—and her husband. The first doubtful hope within her had commanded her to seek for harmony and true union with Ulrick and no longer to be content with merely pampered inertia. Her mother would help her with this, because it was at her mother's command that she had married Arvidsen—that her family might be lifted out of poverty.

She had thought this a right act, until her doubtful hope had stirred and suddenly shown her that there was a link binding her wholly to the rich stranger in their midst, and separating her from the blood and law of her own people, for whose welfare she had married this man. Her own kin were content with the results of her marriage; they approved her wifehood; but would she be approved when the days of secret holding were over, and the little life she had brought to budding should look up from her breast at her with strange, Norse eyes and ask mutely: "Have you been a wife to my father? Have you loved? Am I come because you held his light high for him?"

Her mother's fury at the mere hint of Arvidsen's child had shocked, frightened, and bewildered her. It was the unimagined antithesis of all she had expected. For what had all Mrs. Cato's terrible secret sacrifices been made but for the perfection of her children's lives? And now that the supremely perfect thing was, perhaps, coming to one of her daughters, how was it that she did not cry out: "This is my reward?"

What had brought these questions flooding upon Cynthia? The hope; the hope for which she knew she would endure, risk, sacrifice anything and everything. The mother nature was upon her, opening her eyes to read all women. She alone of that luncheon group had comprehended Arvidsen's point of view. She had *felt* the truth of it. Part of her new fear was that she had awakened too late, that Ulrick had shaped his life away from her, learned not to need her. Perhaps some other woman had been his torch bearer—was so even now! Who was Cadet Blue? Here another flood of thoughts engulfed her, and, in the drowning swirl of them, she forgot Barbara and her boldness and lies, forgot even her mother and her sacrifices and tyrannies and her scorn of Ulrick's line. She was praying, vaguely but passionately, that her hope might become a certainty and her marriage a union.

CHAPTER VIII.

Even the most élite of hostesses is not immune from the season's fashion in disease, rather the contrary. Mrs. Waters Wright had retired suddenly, convinced of it. Her reception had been abandoned on the doorstep, as it were. Besides the serious matter of giving society an unoccupied half-hour, Mrs. Wright's indisposition had consequences in the life of Cynthia Lee Arvidsen. Instead of nodding her plumes over a cup of orange pekoe at five-



"Let us go away!" Cynthia breathed. She was staring at the blended shadow as if it were a gibbet,

thirty, she was speeding from the Wright portals in the direction of Arvidsen's office. Mrs. Cato made only slight demur; she was more than will-

ing to show herself abroad in her new gown. For this reason she did not too closely question her daughter's desire to see her husband so soon again.

She did say, however: "I should think you'd had enough of him for one day!"

"Ulrick is going away to-night," Cynthia answered evasively.

"My dear, he has departed before at various times without breaking your heart! However, I have no objection."

"Mother, weren't you a little amazed at Ulrick to-day?" Cynthia turned her wide eyes on her parent searchingly. "I never knew he had read things—and could talk like that. I felt so out of it."

"No, I wasn't surprised a bit. It's just what I'd expect. Arvidsen is a peasant. All peasants are like that when they get a little education to take them out of their proper sphere. They develop a perfect craze for intellect. Of course, it never sits gracefully upon them, like the refined scholarship of a gentleman. I thought how ridiculous he made himself—setting up his opinions against the cultured ideas of that clever Mr. Sample."

"Ulrick thinks for himself."

"Good gracious, Cynthia! So does everybody. But persons who are veritably of *le beau monde*, like Mr. Sample, know what ideas are in good form and seasonable, and they have the savoir-faire to keep their convictions to themselves. Did you ever see anything so absurd as Barbara, with her hoydenish ways and her string of pamphlet phrases? My hands itched to be at her. If she were ten years younger, what a lesson she'd get! But other times, other manners, my dear. Mr. Sample, instead of detesting her, is quite infatuated! There'll be a wedding there soon, mark me!" She banished her gay and scornful manner and sighed. "Ah, well—a mother cannot expect to keep her children always with her! That is our cross. My compensation is that I can defy any mother to prove that she has managed more cleverly with her children than I have with mine."

Cynthia answered obediently:

"You've been wonderful, mother."

"By the way, Cynthia, though I said nothing at the time, I could see that Ulrick was most uncomfortable while Ledyard was giving away his little flirtation with this Cadet Blue woman. No doubt it was just a trifling matter—I can't think that Ulrick is insensible to the fact that *Cynthia Lee* is his wife—but I shall make a point of getting all Ledyard knows out of him, without arousing the boy's suspicions."

"Mother!" Cynthia's tones were sharp and tremulous. "There was no flirtation. There couldn't be anything——" She stopped short. It was this terrifying suspicion that had made her cry out to Ulrick to take her to Mandalek.

"Oh, nothing serious, you silly child! Though I consider your pride perfectly proper. You heard Ledyard say that there were business reasons. Of course, that was why Ulrick flirted with her, and it was all perfectly harmless——"

"If Ulrick could do that, he'd be horrid—horrid! I should hate him!"

"Don't be absurd!" sharply. "Why on earth are you so stirred up about Ulrick to-day? You've been married to him for three years. That should have cured any tendency to excitement there may have been in the beginning. Besides, your marriage was not for selfish pleasure, but a matter of duty, like your mother's—but never shall you undergo a second trial, as I was obliged to do. As to Ulrick's flirting with this Cadet Blue, as a business move, it was doubtless necessary."

They had turned into Lindholm Street. Cynthia could see the pale-gray columns that seemed to support the new building, which Ulrick had preferred to call the "Pine Tree," rather than the "Arvidsen." It was solid, handsome, unpretentious, a little heavy looking in its solidity; in short, not unlike its owner. Cynthia seemed to be seeing it for the first time. She was looking

past the material edifice and the commercial value, seeking the spirit of the man. Something—a flash of blue—appeared for an instant near or in the entrance and disappeared. She trembled, her hands tightened. Mrs. Cato, also, was seeing blue.

"Look! Look!" she whispered excitedly. "Just behind us in the taxi—a blue dress! There's another with her, both in blue. Cynthia, I'm sure it's the woman! They always ride in taxis, that kind."

Cynthia controlled her tremor and attempted jocularly.

"That's the fifth blue one you've spotted, mother. Ledyard only said there was one."

"She might have a sister." Mrs. Cato was straining her neck to get a full view of the taxi's occupants. Now she said disappointedly: "Oh, they've turned down a side street. Still—that's no proof—As for spotting—a vulgar word!—I think I know my duty as a mother. By the way, what *were* those books Ulrick was talking about? Would they interest me? I love a good romance. Something by Ibsen, I remember, and—oh, yes—Mr. Spencer's 'Principles.' The latter, I dare say, I should enjoy, for certainly no one has higher principles than your mother."

"I don't know, mother. I never knew before to-day that Ulrick read—and knew things. I realize that I don't know him at all. Perhaps it's because we've never been really alone together and I was never thinking of him, only of myself and my family. He must have been very disappointed in me. I wish—oh, I *wish*—I had known how to be a companion to him! I've never been that—never!"

Mrs. Cato's eyes snapped.

"I should hope not, indeed! Whoever heard of a wife wanting to be a man's companion? Oh, you don't know what my training and watchfulness have saved you from in your married

life! I may add, my child, that your suggestion is very nearly indelicate. Have a little dignity about you, and keep men at a distance."

CHAPTER IX.

Arvidsen's offices were in a corner of the building, at some distance from the elevator. In approaching them, his private offices were passed before the door with "Walk in" on its glass was reached.

The western sun was flooding that side of the building and outlining motion and figures on the frosted glass whenever any one came directly between the sun-blazed window and the door. As the two women came down the corridor, they could see the form of Ulrick seated at his desk and moving an arm as if gesturing forcibly in conversation. Presently a woman's slim shadow appeared on the glass. She was going toward him, her hands outstretched and waving in fervent emphasis. He rose and apparently attempted to pull up the blind. But before the sun was wholly cut off, the woman, who had followed him to the window, flung herself upon his breast. He dropped the blind and put his arms around her.

Cynthia was directly outside the door. She stopped, grasping her mother's arm almost savagely. She was trembling. Her eyes looked blankly at the silhouette, her lips paled.

"Cadet Blue! I knew it!" Mrs. Cato's whisper was a hiss of triumph.

"Let us go away!" Cynthia breathed. She was staring at the blended shadow as if it were a gibbet.

"Certainly *not*!" her mother declared. "I shall go in and demand an explanation."

"Yes—yes—we will go in, of course." Cynthia seemed not to know what she was saying; but she arrested Mrs. Cato's hand in the act of knocking on the door. "Not that way. No one goes into his private office."

"Well!" Mrs. Cato was out of all patience.

"No. We'll go in the regular way." She moved on and entered the fourth door. She wondered how her feet walked, because she could not feel them. She seemed to be ice from her knees down. "I want to see Mr. Arvidsen at once, please," she said to the office boy, who was reading over the switchboard.

Mrs. Cato swept forward and stopped him as he was about to put in the plug.

"Don't announce us!" she commanded. "Mr. Arvidsen knows."

She preceded Cynthia swiftly in the direction of Ulrick's illicit tête-à-tête. There were two rooms to traverse. She was no sooner out of earshot than the boy announced her to his master. At the door of Ulrick's private office, for the first time in her life, Cynthia put her mother by with authority and entered first, after a brief rap. She had acted on a half-defined hope, or impulse, which had lingered over from the days of belief in elfin friends and wishing rings—namely, that if she did not rush at once upon that blended shadow, that gibbet, but waited just a little while, perhaps it would not be there at all when at last she did advance upon it. Perhaps the woman who had stolen her happiness, ere she knew it as such, would dissolve into ether!

Ulrick sat at his desk. He was alone. There was a door behind him. It led into the little room of his private suite, where he kept his library of timber reports and his maps. The door was closed. Cynthia's faith in fairies died there. She had vaguely hoped to find no woman with Ulrick. Now the fact that she found none confirmed her deepest fears. It was a statement of guilt.

Mrs. Cato's black eyes gleamed maliciously at her son-in-law. They had already noted the closed door, Arvidsen's preoccupied pose and the grave mask of his face, and the telephone so near his hand. Instantly she realized

that the office boy had given warning of their coming. There would be no dramatic exposé, no splendid outcries, no regal gestures doorward to speed the fleeing hussy, no lightnings of abuse to fell that peasant arrogance. "I could whip that boy!" was her inward comment.

"I hope we don't disturb you, my dear Ulrick," she purred.

"Not at all, mother-in-law," he answered, with forced heartiness. He rose and drew up a chair for her. She declined it. Cynthia put her hand on his arm timidly.

"Will you come home with me now?" she asked. "I came for you."

He surveyed her gravely.

"I'm afraid that's impossible just now. In fact, I may not get home before I go to Mandalek. I find I must positively get up there to-night."

"Please come," she urged.

He showed surprise and regarded her more keenly.

"Are you ill? You look pale."

Cynthia had no wheedling arts. She had only the chill remembrance that she was not pretty and had no charm. It made her voice cold and metallic.

"I'm not ill. Please come."

She saw now that he was thinking of her no longer. She did not know how to continue. She was baffled. Even in this little interview, she was compelled to see how completely she was out of touch with her husband's life. She essayed to say several things, and succeeded only in framing a halting apology.

"You're not angry with me for coming up here?"

"No—no—of course not." Then he added: "It's a pleasure to see you at any time." She felt that his thoughts were elsewhere—behind the closed door. He still stood, his attitude inviting her to depart. She looked toward the door, feeling herself urged

to it; perhaps she took a step thither, for Arvidsen immediately held it open for her. There was nothing to do but go.

"Well! You *did* make a nice mess of it!" Mrs. Cato was furious. "Another time let *me* manage! The idea of letting him put you off like that! I'd have had her out—the creature! Oh, I could shake you!"

In response to repeated thrusts of this sort, Cynthia said, at last:

"I couldn't! I knew when I stood there in his office that I had no right to interfere. When he married me, it was love he wanted, of course. What else had I to give him? We never thought of that—only of what we were to get from him. I know now what I must have meant to him then. I've failed him. Oh, it was a vile thing I did! It was the meanest kind of thieving. It was dishonest and impure. It has worked such evil for him—even though he doesn't know——"

"Doesn't know *what*, pray?" her mother broke in viciously. Her black eyes were glittering with scorn and a smile of malice curved her lip. "Really, my dear, even if you haven't any temperament, I should think marriage would have enlightened you at least a *trifle*. Of course, Arvidsen found out in the first week of the honeymoon why you had married him." A brief, contemptuous laugh gave more venom to the point of her speech. "It must have been a very chill and salutary experience for a man of his nature. But no doubt he had his diversions, even then—the wretch!"

"Then you should have taught *me* how to be his diversion! You say you know all about men; then why didn't you teach me how to keep my husband? Is there anything else worth knowing?" Cynthia cried out. "You let me marry him, knowing nothing. I didn't even know what marriage meant. I didn't know what was expected of me. I don't

know now—or I wouldn't have lost Ulrick."

"You'd let him drive over you, if he wanted to?" Mrs. Cato laughed briefly, contemptuously. "To think a daughter of mine should have so little pride! You know who'd be sitting beside him when he drove over you, don't you? Have some spirit about you!"

Her scorn failed to rouse Cynthia to the commanded effort. There is a mental condition in which the intellect—as well as the organs of speech—seems insensible; reason can shape no protest, it is inert, but there is liberated a different consciousness, so vast and acute that it grasps as in a pure revelation the deeps of things which reason might never fathom. It is the consciousness of feeling, the heart's discovery—too often dormant until called forth by pain. It had come upon Cynthia. She could neither speak nor think. She seemed as numb and dumb as her mother pronounced her. In reality she was seeing her whole life vastly and clearly; and she knew Mrs. Cato at last!

She saw that it was vanity most of all which ruled that lady. Her tyranny itself was vanity—and vanity is the sign of the shallow heart, which has touched life at no point profoundly. Not sympathy for her daughter, but vanity, rose in fury at Arvidsen's infidelity. Vanity, too, had its small, malicious pleasure in seeing Cynthia humbled, after the affront she had offered in desiring to place her wifehood before her daughterhood. And vanity was triumphant—there would be no grandchildren!

Cynthia grasped the whole matter. She saw that her mother did not realize in the least that she had seized upon her daughter's life with a strangle hold, and that her dominance was pernicious in all ways; for the vanity that could so usurp personal rights was too blind to know itself harmful. It expected

gratitude—and love! She realized her enslavement and felt as helpless as any chattel slave born in serfdom and sold on the block. She had awakened too late. Ulrick was lost to her. Her chance of freedom through him was gone, stolen from her while her will and her mind had drowsed under the oldest hypnotism in the world.

Mrs. Cato was now deciding on the alimony. She had not ceased talking for ten seconds. Her fury was a wine to her. Instead of exhausting her, it inspired her to finer flashings of fury. It was like motoring in an electric storm to ride with Mrs. Cato in this mood.

At the house it was all retailed ad lib for the benefit of Polly Ledyard, a faded, blond spinster, with dimples and large, innocuous blue eyes, and the details of the divorce were discussed.

There was no idea in the elder women's heads that Arvidsen's wife had any will of her own or any right to decide for herself. She had never been "Arvidsen's wife" to them.

Mrs. Cato's knowledge of legal procedure was nil, but her demands were infinite and her imagination lacked nothing. So she hesitated not to stipulate for Arvidsen's house, a plenitude of shares in his business, and a lump sum of hundreds of thousands. Then, that nothing might be lacking, she added a European trip to restore Cynthia's health. Miss Polly put off her habitual languor somewhat and entered into the details with enthusiasm.

Cynthia sat in the window seat, silent, and, after the first, almost unnoticed. Mrs. Cato did not feel it necessary to refer to her.

CHAPTER X.

Miss Polly was insisting on morning sun in her bedroom in the New York flat, when Arvidsen's footsteps sounded in the hall. He was evidently in a hurry. Cynthia had the feeling

that if she could only get to him, everything might still be all right, but that the Giant's Causeway and the Wall of China stood between. Mrs. Cato said:

"I will manage this, Cynthia." She sailed majestically to the door and called authoritatively: "Ulrick, come here at once, if you please!"

"All right, mother-in-law," he answered, in his usual tone of good nature. Arvidsen's voice always indicated a man poised and at peace with all the world. He ran on up the stairs to his room. It was by such things that he had made a secret enemy of her—by pleasantly, even humorously, acquiescing in her orders and then proceeding on his own prearranged business as if she had not spoken. By the time he returned, she was foaming—figuratively speaking. He entered with his grip and cap in his hand. His light overcoat was open and hung loosely from his big shoulders.

"What can I do for you, ma'am? You'll have to talk fast, for I've got a train to catch. Good-by, Cynthia." He stooped over and kissed his wife's lips before any one realized what he was about.

"Oh, infamous!" Mrs. Cato exclaimed, tuning her full contralto to its royalest key. "Never touch my daughter again! You have betrayed and insulted her!"

"What's the matter, Cynthia?" He hardly showed even surprise at Mrs. Cato's outburst; but Cynthia knew that his face was a mask when he chose to make it so.

"Address me, sir! My poor, wronged child is not without a mother to speak for her. Let me tell you, sir, that I know all your disgraceful conduct. Oh, I saw you wince and flush and try to change the subject to-day when Ledyard let Cadet Blue out of the bag. Ah, ha! You've nothing to say to that, have you?"

"Not yet. I don't know where we

are yet." He turned again to Cynthia. She looked limp and her eyes were pitiful.

"I saw what was behind. Yes, I have investigated," his mother-in-law stormed on. "I have all the facts—all the facts—of your liaison with this infamous woman. All the evidence is in my possession, and I shall put the matter in a lawyer's hands to-morrow. You were never a fit person in any way to enter my family. You are not of our world. Your whole pedigree is inferior. You have disgraced us; and I shall begin proceedings for *absolute divorce* to-morrow."

Arvidsen's eyes took in the time on the mantel clock, then glanced keenly across the faces of all three women.

"You can't divorce me," he said. "Besides, five minutes' explanation—But there's no time to straighten this out now. But don't talk about divorcing me."

"And why not, pray?"

His eyes twinkled briefly.

"Well, because I'm not married to you, for one reason. There are others; but that is almost sufficient."

Mrs. Cato nearly suffocated in an excess of fury.

"We saw the woman in your arms!" she shrieked. "Through the glass of your office door!"

"I don't know what you mean," he said, but Cynthia saw that he *did* know. "I can satisfy you in the matter, Cynthia, as soon as we can have a talk together. But for the present, you'll take my word, won't you?" Even to himself this sounded a little lame.

"I saw it, too," she whispered. "You see—I saw it."

He glanced at the clock again anxiously.

"I'll have to ask you to take my word till I get back. You'll do that, won't you?"

"She will *not*!" Mrs. Cato's wrath burst all bounds. "Do you really sup-

pose that my daughter cares anything about you—or ever has! She sacrificed herself for her family, and nicely you have rewarded her! But Providence is rewarding her. She shall have an alimony fit for all her needs. I shall insist on the last penny."

Arvidsen's lips tightened, his healthy skin changed color—perhaps with the sudden muscular effort for control—and his violet eyes shot a metal flame that Cynthia had never seen before, though there were men up at Mandalek who could have told tales of Ulrick Arvidsen with that light in his eyes.

"Can't you talk for yourself?" he asked her curtly. "You'll take my word till I come back, won't you? As to the rest of what your mother says—that's just her temper, isn't it? You'll take my word." It was no longer a question, but a command.

"I'm not blaming you. I haven't the right. I haven't been a good wife," she stammered.

"You suit me," shortly.

"You—you look so— You never looked at me like that before. You make me afraid. That's what is the matter with me. All my life I've been afraid. They never let me have any mind or will of my own. And when they told me to marry you, I did that, too. That's why I married you. So I can't blame you for what I saw today. It's all my fault. I disappointed you."

Arvidsen wheeled on her with utter amazement in his face. For a moment he could not speak.

"Then what your mother said about your marrying me for money is true?" It was no longer the clear, even voice of the poised man, master of himself. It was straining for control. But even if it meant dissolution, Cynthia was bent on easing her conscience by telling the whole truth. She weighed her words.

"Yes. No—that was why they told

me to marry you. I didn't do it myself for money. I did it because they told me to. But I didn't love you. So it's my fault that you don't love me now."

"Cynthia!" Mrs. Cato broke in with anger.

"Just hold off, mother-in-law," Ulrick said; and she obeyed the tone in his voice, which never permitted any one to disobey. As Ledyard had said: "People do what Ulrick tells them because they feel it would be a mistake not to."

"I saw you put your arms round her," Cynthia continued.

"And I saw her go into the office—the blue woman Ledyard told us about. And I know you love *her* now, and not me. And that's why I have to divorce you. It's been a mistake—a wicked mistake. Now we have to suffer for it——" She stopped short, trembling.

Arvidsen's skin showed white through his healthy tan, his eyes were hard. It was the merciless fighter who was aroused against her; the peasant



"What do you expect me to say?" he asked hoarsely. "There's only one right name for a woman who sells herself. I can't call my wife that."

earth that knew naught natively of polish and soft methods, but had risen and taken life and power by titanic means; the peasant who had built his mount of achievement by hurling bowlders against the sun, hearing them crash together, stone by stone, as the roar of each tradition of class bondage and limitation broken echoed through his world. To him, Cynthia had been as the summit rock of his heap; the peak always in light, reflecting the first rays

of morning to him, and holding over him a remote, starry tenderness when all else was dark.

He did not understand all Mrs. Cato's views of ancestry; but it is true that he had desired Cynthia partly because he had been led to think of her as of some princess, almost inaccessible unless the gods themselves should place her within his reach. In the books he loved, he had read the heroic romance of that thing called ancestry. Nobles in blood and name were nobles in nature; and high women shone with the ethereal beauty of their souls. He had shrined Cynthia Lee in virgin gold and crystal. Her large, pale, brilliant eyes had been his founts of light. He had adored the soft coolness of her person, the gentle aloofness of her manner. Though he had surged about her hungrily with the deep unrest of the sea about a white cliff, yet when he had taken her, it was as if he had laid hands upon an altar. She was all his ideal of love and life made concrete; and, to Arvidsen's nature, which was always consciously on the upward struggle, not only love, but the mere act of loving, must be touched with consecration.

It had not embittered him to feel the clamor and strength of passion humbled at her threshold. For, all his life, Arvidsen had humbled passion before the ideal, else he had never risen from the caves. His had not been a marriage of passion, any more than hers. He had given her the best he knew of love; it was something he had learned from poets and from the mists in the deep emerald woods, from the living flame of maples in October, from the fervent songs of his mother in the little Lutheran church, from spring mornings spreading soft glory on his broad river pathway and sparkling on the logs that leaped and turned beneath his sure feet. Now to hear from her lips that money had made the match, controlled her choice, roused him to cruel fury.

"What do you expect me to say?" he asked hoarsely. "There's only one right name for a woman who sells herself. I can't call my wife that. Is that all your breeding mounts up to, mother-in-law? To sell your high-born flesh and blood to a lumberjack for the contents of his wallet?" He stifled an oath. "I wish I'd stayed a riverman, like my father, and married a woman made of my own clay, that wouldn't fear to love me and give me children. Just a strong woman to work with me and lie beside me like a wife. I wouldn't care if her hands were red and coarse like my mother's, if they reached up and clung round me in the dark, and her breast was warm with longing for me."

"Would you have your wife for your mistress?" Mrs. Cato shrieked.

"Yes!" he answered her savagely. "So would any normal man. No decent man craves to have two women in his life. He wants all in one. I didn't know. I was a fool. I thought that, because the woman I married was cold, she was holy, and that she never gave me anything because she was too high to know a man's needs—"

"Oh, Ulrick!" Cynthia caught at his arm. "I didn't know. I *didn't* know. I've never known anything." He pushed her off as if her fingers hurt him.

"You haven't any heart in you, or you'd have known. But, yes, you did know. You and your mother knew so well what love means to a man, and how it rules him altogether, that you used it to get money. I wouldn't sell timber as basely as that. I thought I was too low for you because you were so pure and high. You were my light. And all the time you had just sold your body for my money."

"It wasn't my fault—it—" But he would not hear her.

"It *was* your fault, because you did

it. You didn't have to. You were full grown. You were responsible."

"How dare you blame me so, when you have wronged me, too?" she cried, a sudden gust of hot violence taking her. He laughed bitterly.

"Why shouldn't I go my way? There's no man living who can get along without the touch of a human woman—who won't go seeking for her. What does he work for but to be able to keep a woman close to him, to care for her and to have her for his blessing on everything he puts his hand to? Is there any other happiness for a man? I asked you a while back to take my word. Now I don't care. As for your divorce—well, you can't get it. If I kissed all the women in Minnesota, it wouldn't constitute legal grounds for a divorce. You've shown your hand too soon, mother-in-law. Since you only pawned your daughter in my shop, I'll hold on to her till you can pay up; I won't have any of the kind of publicity that will hurt the business I've built up in spite of people who tried to keep me down."

"Oh! Throwing your money in our faces! How common!" Mrs. Cato cried, the more shrilly because words were so inadequate. "I'll employ detectives!"

His heavy jaw snapped, the ugly light gleamed behind his lowered lids.

"At my expense?" he mocked.

"We will pay for them!" Mrs. Cato screamed, now beside herself. "My sister and I have a small income, sir. We are not dependent on you for our detectives."

"Time's up," Arvidsen announced. "I've got real work to do up at Mandalek. I've stayed here long enough to have you pull down all my home means; but I won't stay while my business falls, too." He walked to his wife deliberately. Automatically she shrank back from the potent figure of vengeance he seemed to be as he advanced on

her. He misunderstood her action and took hold of her shoulders harshly. "Don't leave my house or start any nonsense, because the law is with me, not with you. You belong to me, not to your mother. Don't forget that! When I come back, I'll decide whether you stay on here with me or not. I'll decide. Do you understand? And you'll do just as I say."

A sob or a smothered curse heaved through his big body, his hands gripped her soft shoulders cruelly. Cynthia felt a little as if a mountain in eruption trembled over her.

"You—you——" Again he caught the savage words back, till only the deep undertone of pain broke through. "I've loved you! I've loved you! And you've done this to me!"

He jammed his cap down to his eyes, picked up his suit case, and tramped out.

Scarcely conscious of what she did, Cynthia put her hands to her shoulders where his had gripped her. She had a curious notion afterward that it was the pang of those bruises that shattered the years of numbness. "You belong to me, not to your mother," they echoed him.

CHAPTER XI.

It was dusk in the room and outside. It had not yet occurred to any one to turn on the lights. Perhaps there was an undefined impression that Mrs. Cato was generating enough electricity. It might have been half an hour after Arvidsen's dramatic exit that Ledyard Lee sauntered in. Hearing voices in strenuous debate, he entered the library.

"Hello, mother! Hello, Aunt Polly! Plotting the overthrow of the hated city, that you're sitting in the dark? Fancy Cynthia going up to Mandalek with Ulrick! I didn't know she had so much wifely get-up to her. Saw them tearing along to the station in a taxi.

Cynthia didn't even wave a hand to little brother—don't know that she saw me. I wouldn't have spotted *her* but for a street lamp."

He turned on the bracket lamps over the chimneypiece. The first thing his glance lit upon was Cynthia, clinging to the portières and looking as if another word would knock her knees from under her.

"Why—why, Cynthia!" he gasped. "Who—who the devil was that with Ulrick?"

She took hold of the lapel of his coat and held him forcibly and stared into his face.

"She was with him—that woman? He has taken her to Mandalek?"

"Wha—what woman?" he stammered.

"You know her. You call her Cadet Blue."

"Why— Oh, I say! Oh—oh, that's absurd!" He was perplexed, vague. "Oh, I see! You're jealous because of what I said to-day. That's it. Of course, Ulrick isn't taking *her* to Mandalek with him. All the same, I'd like to know——" But he pulled himself up sharply and repeated, with hollow exaggeration: "Of course *not*, Cynthia. *Of course not!*"

"We caught them together in his office this very evening," Mrs. Cato rose to the occasion, literally and with a sweeping gesture.

"She was reclining in his bold, unspiritual embrace," Miss Polly supplemented.

"There will be an absolute divorce, with enormous alimony. You will be a witness. You will tell *all* you know."

"Oh, I say, you know! Oh, really! Oh, I say!" the boy protested, with blank utterance, but acute distress. "I'm *sorry!* Oh, I say, I *am* sorry! I *am* sorry! I was afraid of it all along. I never saw a woman so determined. But you know, Cynthia, these accidents will occur. They happen to

men very frequently. We men are very much tempted, Cynthia. Usually a man's wife doesn't know anything about it. No man wants to worry his wife by telling her of his temptations. I shall never do it. And I'm sure Ulrick never meant you to know, because he's not one to worry others with his troubles. Don't worry, Cynthia. He'll be all right after a while. You just be patient and help him out. That's all a wife *can* do when a man is ensnared."

"Ledyard, don't be an idiot!" his mother admonished him sharply. "What do you know of a wife's duties? Your sister's dignity is insulted past repair. Her very ancestry is insulted."

Ledyard puzzled over this a bit before he answered earnestly:

"Oh, mother, I'm *sure* Ulrick wasn't thinking of Cynthia's ancestry, and never intended to insult it. And I *do* think it a wife's duty to stand by and protect her husband in such a crisis. I consider it very beautiful, too. I feel that I should like my own wife to be especially tender to me whenever I am ensnared. It's—er—it's—maternal. That's the word—maternal."

"I could box your ears, you silly boy!" Mrs. Cato cried, exasperated.

A mischievous gleam banished the ponderous clouds on his young brow.

"That's very maternal, too, of course, but not just what I mean." He became serious again and surveyed his sister with some sympathy and more perturbation. "Sis, I'm awfully sorry you're hurt. Honest, I am. Of course, it must annoy you a good deal to have Ulrick led astray in this way. You look pale, too. I guess it's given you a headache, hasn't it? Ah, but he'll come back, Cynthia. Yes, he'll come back—when the other one has palled. Of course, I don't pay any attention to mother's wild talk about a divorce. Of course *not!*" His tone was excessively

emphatic, while he questioned anxiously with his eyes.

"Not after he has taken her——" Cynthia began. Then she caught at his coat lapels again, and the new, acid stirring of jealousy turned all her delicacy to steel sharpness. "Tell me—you've seen her—is she so beautiful—so—so much prettier than I?"

"Cynthia Lee! Are you comparing——"

"Don't interfere, mother!" And Mrs. Cato was silent from surprise. Mrs. Arvidsen's grip on her brother's lapels suggested that she would pull the hated truth from him at any cost of fine cloth. "Tell me!" she commanded.

Her brother fidgeted. He was a kind and a loyal, but likewise a truthful boy, and her demand made him unhappy.

"Oh, I say, you know! Really, I *do*! Why, I'm your brother, Cynthia, see? I'm positive that any other man—Ulrick, for instance"—he put this in, as he considered, with wondrous tact—"would consider *you*, oh, far and *away* prettier than Mrs. R—er—Cadet Blue. But a brother, you know, never *can* consider his own sister quite his ideal type. A man likes his own ideal type. Now, Cadet Blue isn't a lady—*quite*. Oh, she's not vulgar, or illiterate—oh, no. But she's the sort of woman one describes as *not quite* a lady. She's awfully pretty, I think, because she's *my* ideal type, see? She has lots of red-gold hair, curly—wavy, I should say—and a peach's skin, and big blue eyes—not like Ulrick's or mine—just sapphire sea blue—very lovely and with almost *too* luring a glance. And there isn't a trick about taking a man's heart she doesn't know. At first I felt for that woman—well—I felt for her everything that ever was in grand opera. Then I discovered her treachery. So will Ulrick. He's shrewd. When he comes to himself—after that first dreadful fire is quenched—he'll see that her

heart is false. Then he'll return to Cynthia."

"Never!" Mrs. Cato insisted roundly. "Absolute divorce!" She reiterated the two words. The sound of them seemed to inflate her with power.

Ledyard looked more and more dejected as his arguments failed to convince. He took another tack.

"I think you're very silly. Yes, you, too, mother. You've accustomed yourselves to luxuries that alimony will never cover. Cynthia would get *some* alimony, but why throw away *all* for a little piece? Killing the goose that lays the—— Oh, I call it *silly*! Just for a little pride and hurt feelings. Mother, I say this with all respect, with—with—*all reverence*—but the fact is you are too fond of a scrap. You don't know the *war's* over. I've noticed this in you; and it blinds you to your real interests. You're very willful, mother. I say it reverently. Oh, dear—I've a good mind to catch that eight-thirty train to Starrville. I could make connections with the B. & B. to Vilhalmur and take a motor or a rig out to Mandalek."

He pondered a moment, then said hopelessly: "But how can I go spying on him? A man can't intrude on another that way. Not on Ulrick. I think you women are behaving very badly," he burst out desperately. "Ulrick has done everything for us, and we've just dragged on him. But I'm not going to always. I'm learning about timber, and I'll be worth my salt to him yet—and to myself, too. I warn you I'll stick to Ulrick! I'm grateful to him. Oh, I wish I dared to go up there to-night and reason with him!"

Tears stung his lids. He broke down boyishly.

"I never knew women had it in them to act this way. It's—it's—repulsive! Ulrick's worth the whole of us—and twenty heartless wives besides. He's worthy as much as any ancestor

we've got! *He's* alive—and, I can tell you, *that's* important. His own little Mandalek is worth more than the whole of Josieville, Louisiana, where *we* came from. I think a heap of Ulrick. Do you hear? I think the *world* of him!"

Overcome, and ashamed of his inability to restrain his feelings, Ledyard dashed from the room and locked himself and his burning eyelids in his own quarters for the rest of the evening.

Cynthia's feelings had undergone another change, with her brother's revelations concerning Arvidsen's traveling companion. From being numb and almost dumb in her first shock, and too crushed under a weight of self-condemnation to make virile protests, she had become actively and painfully sensitive. She was jealous. She hated Cadet Blue. She felt a passionate fury against the elders of her family. She raged at Ulrick for the harsh things he had said to her, when he himself was about to elope, even if the elopement were only temporary! She resented the peasant fiber of him, which had come out in the rudely phrased arraignment of her, the coarsely told truths—for truths they had been—all those terrible definitions of the motives for her sale.

Yet, after all, was she made of such different and so much finer substance than Ulrick's clay, since now that individuality had awakened in her, it clamored only for the common things, for love and oneness in mating, for little children to make the bonds of service more beautiful, for her place in life beside her man, where any princess and charwoman may stand, laboring, rejoicing, sorrowing if need be? The woman in Cynthia Lee Arvidsen had awakened to find itself neither goddess, nun, tyrant, queen, moloch, nor unsexed symbol; but just woman, with the nature craving in her—to give—annulling all her selfish, tyrannical, and parasitic education.

To this woman Ulrick's excursion

with Madame Cadet Blue struck a harder blow than vanity might reel and recover from. The affront to the wife, with its implied loss of love, was secondary. It was not merely a provider and a lover and a husband that the ruthless redhead was snatching from her to crown itself withal. It was the mate of her body and the father of her little children that might be. She felt that they were all leagued in wickedness against her to rob her life of fruition, and to lay her womanhood waste with barrenness.

A white heat of revolt possessed her. Flaming swords of do and dare leaped before her eyes. She glimpsed another Holy Grail, herself a Lady Galahad in search of it—a little, sentient, living cup, a child's upreaching hands, the beaker of it, a child's clear eyes the vision and the wine. She would set forth to find it, under the ensign of the one unrivaled, paramount, and primal woman's right, with its white and starry cross. Every pulse in her strong, young being chanted a battle hymn.

CHAPTER XII.

When Cynthia Arvidsen stole down the back stairs and out of the basement door of her husband's house and caught a downtown street car, she was sufficiently disguised in a motor coat and a thick veil. She carried a small traveling bag. When she reached the station, she was trembling so violently that her knees refused to hold her up. She sat down where she could watch the tracks and gave her attention chiefly to three slips of paper on which she had written Ledyard's unintentional directions: "The eight-thirty to Starrville, and catch the B. & B. there to Vilhalmur, and get a rig or motor from there to Mandalek."

Presently she mustered up enough courage to verify this itinerary at the information wicket. Then she put one

slip of paper in her purse, one in her bag, and the third in her pocket, so that if she lost one or two, she might yet preserve a third. She recited the sentence constantly so that she might not be dependent on the papers.

In a few minutes, which seemed eternities, she entered the train and set forth upon the only journey she had ever in her life taken alone! Above and beneath and through her pain, there was a thrill of liberation and of conquest to be; for Cynthia meant to conquer. Having suddenly broken her own lifelong bonds, she felt invincible. Inevitably she would disrupt the silken net of Cadet Blue, free her big Norseman, and bring him back to his duty! Sometimes she pictured the uproar when the Ledyard sisters should discover her absence, and she hugged herself in gleeful vengeance. She felt splendidly brazen.

"I'm a bold thing!" she said to herself, blushing under her big veil. "Yes, I am. I'm—I'm—a hussy!" She gloried in it.

Mandalek was scarcely beginning to take shape out of the night when the wagon road became its main street. It had been two long, black hours since Cynthia had left Vilhalmur in the only equipage she could hire, a creaking rig drawn by a leisurely and indifferent steed, whose temper and pace seemed to suit his driver perfectly.

She no longer gloried in her adventure. Glory had gone out in the long, slow crawl across the black stretch between Vilhalmur and the lumber town. The dark hour before dawn had been dark, indeed, to her as she had crept in lonely silence through undiscernible country toward a strange place and a scene of which she could prophesy nothing.

The lightning of the ebony, which augurs the gray commencement of day, had begun when she paid the driver

and stood alone on the steps of Ole's Hotel, a large, rough shack slightly illuminated by two oil lamps. Inside, an old man slumbered aloud in a wooden rocker. He was only just sufficiently clothed. Cynthia awoke him, after some violence of voice, and demanded of him Ulrick Arvidsen. His inventory of her took some time, and had to be completed to his satisfaction ere he answered. Then he took a lamp and shambled to the porch, gesturing to her with his thumb to follow. He pointed down into the thick shadow of the road.

"You b'en come da is river. T'ree, four house, den da is Arvidsen's Town."

"Arvidsen's Town?" she wailed. "Oh, isn't he here—in Mandalek?" She had terrible visions of another black journey through the unknown in search of another village. She remembered vaguely Ledyard's merry allusion to Arvidsen's Town, where the family lived. Mine host was shaking soundlessly with laughter.

"Oh, *ja!* Arvidsen's Town is da by der river. Arvidsen's Town is big house wit' white fance rotund. *Ja!* No house is got fance round, but Arvidsen's Town is got fance. When Arvidsens, dey b'en poor, all live in small house. Den Ulrick beat Jens Rigel on de river and he want build big house-somewhar.

"Selma Arvidsen say: 'No. I live har.'

"So Ulrick he build one more little house by de first. Den he make de saw-mill, and Käre Arvidsen he make manage de sawmill.

"Käre say: 'Mudder, come, we make a big house for you.'

"'No,' she say, 'I live har.'

"So Käre he build anudder little house by de oder side and knock down de wall. So now dey got t'ree house lak one. Den Knud he build on de back. And Erik he build on de top when he marry Frieda, and he make a steps up. Den dey got two childs, and

make again more house over top of Käre's room. Den little Olaf he put like pigeon cage on top all; and so all mens call him 'pigeon.' Sax house all make one house, all paint white with white fance round. *Ja*, da is Arvidsen's Town. Ulrick he pay all dat. Ulrick's rich man."

He grinned at her; it was a slow, wide, dark-brown grin. "Ulrick is got woman. He brang har last night. You come too late. *Ja*, all garl is crazy for Ulrick." He nodded and grinned again. "*Ja*. Ay tank dat's what for Selma put fance round. Never mand!

all Mandalek mens and all Arvidsens dey work all night on de yam."

He waved her forth pleasantly, and she stumbled on her uneven way through the thick mists of before dawn, seeking the white fence and the intruding woman sheltered behind it. The



"Barbara!" she whispered.

"Barbara!"

You pretty girl, too. You go knock on da fance."

He held the smoking, smelling lamp high and pointed into the pit of murky shadow that was the street.

"Ay tank dis yar de bridge break and Mandalek, too, get drowned. Sure, if dey don't break dat yam. Ulrick and

only "yam" she was familiar with was edible. She did not understand from mine host's converse that Arvidsen's timbers, swirling in mischievous currents, had mounted into a log jam of such proportions that the increased pressure of waters threatened the bridge, and that Ulrick and all the avail-

able rivermen of Mandalek were at work over the dark flood, holding their lives as nothing in the effort to defeat the unreasoning malevolence of river and surging timber.

There were lamps and candles in some of the houses. Doors were open and rooms empty, except where here and there an aged woman nodded or waited wakefully in her chair for news from the river shore. There were lights and lanterns gleaming along the bank and small, fitful flames darting over the surface of the river. They gleamed bravely through the mist, but they did not beacon to Cynthia, because she did not know what they meant.

The white fence stood out at last, emphasized against the murk. The gate was ajar and the door of the central cottage was wide open. The compound mansion reared like some quaint old fortress. Candles burned on a little table beyond the open door. There was a lamp in the window, sending its small rays into the street.

On the threshold, Cynthia paused. Her heart gave such a thump that she felt as if it would knock her over, and she held tightly to the side of the door. A coat and hat were on the table, their dark silk and fur suggested behind the blowing candle flame. On a couch in the shadowed corner a woman lay. She moved spasmodically under the auto robe that covered her. Cynthia, drawing near to her determinedly, saw that the spasmodic movement resulted from a low, deep, exhausted sobbing. If for the first moment this discovery checked her, the next found her pitiless again. She lifted the candle, and held it high so that its flame would declare all the features of the heart thief. Then, with a trembling hand, she seized the coverlet and swept it from the couch.

"Now," she said, "you must get up! Because—because—I mean to make you look me in the face, if you dare. Because—because—I know you to be a

very wicked woman! It is no longer a secret."

She spoke very firmly through dry lips. To herself her voice sounded like a tiny child's and seemed to come from a great distance.

A little, despairing moan broke from the woman on the couch; it said that the end of all things had been reached. She turned and sat up and faced her accuser. Her hands felt for the coverlet as for something, anything, to grasp and hold. Not finding it, they fluttered helplessly and at last pressed tight, with fingers outspread, over her mouth and cheeks, till little was seen of her gray face but huge, staring eyes, black as pools. The placid and dull twilight of uncomprehension had fled from those eyes. "The stirring of knowledge had come to their waters in a bitter dawn.

CHAPTER XIII.

Cynthia's knees shook and her candle dipped.

"Barbara!" she whispered. "Barbara!"

Then, because impossible terrors rushed upon her newly jealous and passionate heart, she sank upon the foot of the couch and her candle slipped from limp fingers and rolled a greasy circle on the white floor ere it went out. Every familiar gesture, every bold glance, in Sample's studio stood out now in memory, magnified a thousand times—like the seven deadly sins. The legendary figure of Cadet Blue arose and stood in the picture and mocked her; and Ulrick Arvidsen seemed like the fearsome river monster of childhood's horror tales, which crawled up the mudbanks and seized young women from the fields and devoured them. The pale sisters faced each other in the morning gloom, with dreadful looks.

"You were never to know," Barbara said. "He promised." Perhaps there was the feeblest hint of complaint in

her hopeless voice, as if there had still lingered some small human faith to be hurt. "He didn't want you to know himself, he said, and— Maybe you think I *care* about your coming and standing over me and calling me bad, and telling me to look you in the face? But I don't. I don't care a bit!"

"Oh, Barbara!" Cynthia whispered again through her dry lips. "How did you get to be so wicked?"

"It's my freedom!" The girl cried with a short laugh that had not the sound of a laugh. Her eyes were baleful as she stared back at Cynthia. "Isn't this just a part of the whole big lying, *lying* thing?" she mocked. "For it's *all* a *lie*! Everything we're told and everything that happens is just a sneering lie. That's what I think when you come here and call me wicked. But all the world bears *you* out, and sneers and laughs at *me*. I wasn't wicked. I loved him. I did it because I loved him. But you—you didn't love Ulrick at all. You were sold like furniture. So you are very holy and good. But I'm wicked. Because you sold—and I gave!"

"Oh, Barbara!" Cynthia breathed again. She could not speak yet, for the icy weight at the pit of her heart was pulling her down like the great river monster, and the legendary face of Cadet Blue fleered at her over Barbara's shoulder.

"Yes," Barbara continued, but her mockery had gone and the dull, passive bitterness was there again in eyes and voice, "I've thought it all out. If Ulrick died, you could sell again and the world would still call you good. But I've given everything once—so I can never give again, or sell, for marriage. I must be always lonely—or just bad. And that's because I loved so much I never thought to ask any protection. It would have been against our principles for him to protect me. He owed me nothing. We both said that."

She trailed off deeper into the maze of her own anguished conjecturings.

"And so I'm bad. And everything sweet in life is over for me. Love is so sweet and so wonderful. To be always doing little things for some one who wants you to do them—always giving with all your heart—always thinking how to serve him best and help him to be greater and nobler and more famous. Not to claim any of the fame or anything the world gives him; to let him be as free as his nature needs, and ask nothing more than just to be in his heart, to be the thing he loves. Oh, why, *why* did all that turn to badness? Because there was a lie in it. He never told me he was married. He let me think he wasn't. Isn't it odd? Ulrick knew right away that Party was like that—not true."

"Party! Oh—oh, Barbara! Oh, my little sister!" Cynthia broke down utterly in the agony of that relief. The hard terror was swept away in uncontrollable floods of tears; and the river monster that had threatened her with Ulrick's face was washed down from sight, and the legendary smiles of Cadet Blue ceased to mock from the shadowed wall behind Barbara's gray face.

She slipped off the couch and sank on her knees close to her sister, her sobs shaking and beating her down like heavy rain in the reeds. Now that all the specters were departed and there remained no cause for jealousy, and for the dread, slaughterous enmity against her sister, there was no condemnation, either, left to make her courageous enough to look longer into Barbara's awakened eyes. She had come to Mandalek to brave a grief and to fight a wrong; but she had no arts of healing, or of battle, to oppose to this grief and this wrong. She was helpless with the shock of learning that the betrayal and corruption of women and the soul-destroying, brain-numbing disillusionment—which turned young faces haggard

and young eyes stricken and grim from looking on the products of death—that these things, which she had heard of only in books, these things happened. Not only to the socially and morally alien did they come with devastation. They happened to one's own sister.

"Oh, Barbara! Oh, my little sister!" It was all she could say.

"I've been over it and over it till my head hurts. Oh, I'm so tired! If I could only—if there wasn't such a tired, tired ache inside my head, like blows and blows—perhaps I could think of the things I ought to think of. But I can't. I keep wondering what I'm going to think about all the time now, and plan for. I was glad to wake up in the mornings, because I had him to think about. It seemed to make the sun shine when he came into my mind, as soon as I woke. And all day long, whatever I was doing—even when mother was unkind—I'd feel that I always had the thought of him to come back to, when there were other thoughts that weren't happy.

"I used to imagine that my thoughts were like a great ship with sails. In the night, while I slept, it was just as if the ship were out of sight down below the horizon. And when I woke, and my thoughts instantly flew to him, then that was my thought ship, lifting its white, glistening sails over the horizon and winging into a great harbor, where there was one wonderful island with white towers. It was like that morning when we came back from the Bermuda trip, and saw those towers on the Woolworth and the courthouse and the World Building coming out in the dawn like pale silver. Now—oh, how am I going to bear to wake in the mornings—and *think*? Where will my thought ship go sailing now? All the towers are black!" She shivered violently. "Every morning will be like this—every morning like this"—she stifled a little moan with her finger

tips like one in physical pain—"till—till it wears itself out. When will that be?" She shivered again.

There was a cold spring breeze coming through the open door from the gray dawn. Cynthia drew the auto robe up again and put it around Barbara, who regarded her fretfully.

"I don't see why Ulrick told you," she complained. "What good could it do for you to come? Don't shut the door. It isn't the air that makes me feel cold. I'm not strong yet. I often feel like this—even before I found Party out. It's—I'm weak yet." Her lids drooped quickly—to hide something, Cynthia thought; but she felt no eagerness to probe, and she preferred to let Barbara continue under the impression that Ulrick had told her, to account for her arrival in Mandalek.

"Did he tell you *all—all*—I told him?" her sister demanded.

"No—o—no," Cynthia answered half truthfully. "Oh, Barbara, is it the very worst that has happened to you? Or is it only that your heart's broken?"

She had no phrases in which to word woes she had not needed to think of until that morning. She hoped vaguely that it might be heartbreak only. She knew that she herself had suffered terribly that day, because of a shadow on a glass, and had needed only that to turn life ashen. Barbara looked at her queerly, and it seemed to Cynthia that her sister had suddenly gone a great distance away, instead of being close there with her cold, thin brown hand in hers.

"It's worse than a heartache, Cynthia. It's the very worst that can ever come. You don't know at all what I mean."

"Oh—oh, Barbara!" And then Cynthia whispered an awesome thought remembered from childhood's lessons: "Weren't you even afraid of God?"

Barbara moved restlessly.

"Party says there isn't any. We must

be rational. But perhaps that was only another of Party's lies."

This Barbara seemed far removed from the child who had stipulated to die on a Monday, because there might linger enough Sabbath grace to put her soul in heaven.

"Could you cheat any one you loved—lie to him? I couldn't. If it's real love, it can't do that. Party really lied to me, because he let me believe something that wasn't so. I only found out to-day that he's married. Oh, when I saw what he had made of me! Ulrick said that it was just what could be expected of people with such ideas—that they couldn't separate decently, but must keep up the appearance of a home and unity to be a secret fester spot wherever they went. Ulrick was terrible. Not to me. But I was afraid he would go and trample Party to death.

"After I left you and mother to-day—or yesterday—I went back to Party's rooms and we had it out. And he—he was condescending and amused; and he even said that he was disappointed in me, and that *such scenes distressed him!*" She gave vent to a sudden harsh shriek of laughter. "Such scenes! I knew then there had been others. Oh, Cynthia, he had made me a thing like that—just because I had loved him beyond everything! I had even given up God because he said there wasn't any. He always said he was setting me free from all the old traditions and foolish conventions. And I thought—no, I only *pretended*—that I was really free. I wasn't, Cynthia. No. All the time in my heart I was saying to him: 'Because you love me so much, you'll just have to marry me; for that is love. It will force you to make me all yours before all the world as well as here in this little room. It will make you want little children. That's what love is. All the theories haven't changed it.' And I waited for that discovery to come to him, too. I felt it would be longer in

coming to him because he was a man. To a woman it comes right away when she loves a man and—and belongs to him."

She paused. A long sob of exhaustion went through her, but her eyes were tearless.

"Oh, yes, Barbara," Cynthia murmured.

"If you don't want to hear me, you can go away. But I've got to talk. I used to laugh at him in my heart sometimes when he talked about how free we were, because I was thinking how quickly he'd bind me to him in every way as soon as the great thing came to *him*, as it had come to me. He always said passion was holy. And I knew it was, but that he didn't really know it yet. I knew it because, when I forgot absolutely all fears and traditions in his arms, I knew that passion was just love's mighty prayer to give life. And I saw what nonsense it was mother used to talk about dying for love. That isn't what a woman wants to do at all. She wants her love to create, to become a life, and give him the greatest gift of all. I knew then that I wasn't really sincere any longer in talking about our freedom. I *belonged* to him. Not being married didn't make me free. What is the use of all that talk, when it is *in* a woman, in her nature and a part of her, to *belong* to the man she loves? We don't know till we've given love; then we find out that all the talk was just mocking us. I believed in him, and I thought I knew how it would be when he realized that——"

"Oh, Barbara, you don't mean—you're not——" Cynthia cried, pitifully afraid for her sister, and feeling all at once that they were very near to each other. Barbara looked at her briefly with the queer, oblique glance that seemed to make her so baffling and to remove her again to some untraversable distance.

"No," she answered. "There won't be anything like that. That should have awakened me when he—— But I didn't dare to wake up then. And I would do anything he told me to do—— That was because I was so free! Oh, lies, lies!" There was another outburst of the hideous, shrill, self-mocking laughter. Then she fell to sobbing again. "Oh, why didn't I die? Women do sometimes."

"Oh, no, no, Barbara! You mustn't die of love for a bad man like that." Cynthia tried to take Barbara's hands, but they eluded her fretfully; and Barbara's black eyes seemed again to hide behind a veil, screening unimaginable things from her ignorant sister.

"Even murder I could do. That, also, was because it was all a lie. It made me wicked, too. I have hated—*hated!*"

"Him?"

Barbara shook her head; and once more the spasm, as from a physical hurt, twitched her face, her hands fastened on the robe.

"You don't know what I mean at all. I don't want you to know," she fretted. "But I must talk. It lets out the pain. No, I didn't hate him. I loved him. I belonged to him. I hated little children and women who had them; I would turn away when I saw them. Only yesterday, when we rode out into the country, there was a Swedish woman tramping along with her baby in her arms. She sat down under a tree to nurse it. She never thought even to hide her breast; she only thought about the child being hungry and that she was to feed it. I saw its little hands reach up. It seemed to me all at once that I couldn't bear it—I'd been feeling so weak and queer, and—and—hysterical—and such a gush of violence went over me. I wanted to ride over them and trample them. And I told Party. It amused him a little and he laughed at me. He laughed—and still I didn't hate him."

She was silent a while, evidently pon-

dering this point. "To-day I found out. And, because of the things Ulrich had said, I knew he could understand. So I went to him. I didn't dare be alone any longer. I told Ulrich everything. He had to come up here and he wouldn't leave me there to be alone. He knew mother wouldn't worry about me, because she thought I was going over to St. Paul. I suppose you know now that I wasn't going there. I was going to——" She could not finish. The violent shivering had taken hold of her again.

"Oh, Barbara, is this what it means to be—'emancipated'? Didn't you even care what the other women would think if they knew?"

"I suppose some know. Those of Party's set. They think it's all right. Lots of women think they have the same right as men. And so they have! So they have! What right have men, more than we have, to have all the sweets of love? But—the suffering comes on *us*—and such terror—and then a worse thing—worse than the terror. That all comes on us. And there's no way to change it. There's no sweet in it at all. It's all a lie. And the men who preach it are liars. They want us to be free, so that they need feel no responsibility.

"But it isn't only men. We can't blame it all on them. There are lots of women who just despise a woman who wants to love only one man and have children. There are lots of that kind going into the movement and suffrage, for the excitement and because they love to be public. The nice women, some of them, don't know about all this; and those that do know think they have to accept it all, and take it along with them, or they won't be strong enough to win.

"I think all that Ulrich said to-day was true. I knew it, when I found Party out. Do you know what he said to me? That I ought to be grateful to

him for showing me my real nature and setting me free. Oh, what a lie! That isn't a woman's nature—not till liars have spoiled her and made her like that. A woman's nature is to love one man with all of her—all, all for that one man—and to serve and give to him and bear his little children. That's a woman's *nature*. The other way isn't ever a woman's nature. It only comes on her from men's badness and lies—yes, and from the talk of women who want to make her like themselves.

"Maybe it is 'freedom.' But what is the good of it, if it makes such suffering? And it *does* make suffering; because, no matter what you think—or say you think—about it, everything you *feel* is against it. And it is what you *feel* that matters. You can think one way to-day, and another way to-morrow, because you meet people of all sorts of different thoughts. But what you *feel* is *in you*, and that is the strongest in the end. And how much stronger because it has been women's feeling from the beginning! I know now. I risked everything—life, too—to find this out; and I lost everything but life. Oh, why, why didn't I die? Party said to-day that he was always afraid I hadn't the perfect philosophy of it!" She gave out one of her shrill, sudden shrieks of laughter; and then, as before, fell to sobbing.

"Don't, don't!" Cynthia pleaded; and, despite the fretful hands, she took her sister into her arms.

"You needn't despise me," Barbara said. "Because I don't care what the world says about this. It's all a lie. In my heart I know I'm not bad, because I never meant to be. I'll maintain that always, even though I can never have anything out of life any more. I'm not ashamed of love. I loved truly, though *he* was mocking me all the time. But *all* the penalty comes on me, just as if I had meant evil. Life has tricked me—that's all. Ulrick

thinks I can begin life all over, and that I needn't always be unhappy. He doesn't understand what has been done to me. Everything is dead—dead—and a lie. Besides, the world doesn't let a girl begin over again *right*, and have happiness."

Cynthia soothed her against her slender, round bosom and whispered to her little mother words that came, as if she had always known them, from the deepest springs of tenderness.

"My head is so tired with thinking," Barbara murmured. She yielded now to her sister's embrace as if it comforted her. "I never planned any of this. Mother planned it. She said nobody would marry me because I was ugly. Cynthia, do you think mother loves us?"

Cynthia was taken aback.

"Oh, yes—of course—— Why—she's our mother."

Barbara moved restlessly again.

"She couldn't help that, could she? I think mother was one of those wives who only want admiration and luxurious, soft living and just hate to have children. They aren't all modern. I think she resented us. Whenever I see a little child, I want to pick it up and carry it, and play with it. Even the ugly little snub-nosed ones are so cunning. They all look lovely to me. I can't remember mother ever taking me up into her arms the way I've picked up little street children—just because something in your heart makes you pick them up.

"Last summer, on one of our picnics, there was a little tot at the station—such a rosy, curly, little thing with a dirty face. It ran around the platform with a weed flower in its hand; and it went to mother and held up the flower to her and said, 'Oh, pretty!' and caught hold of her dress. And she drew away from it as if she disliked it. But when that New York woman took her poodle out of the baggage car to exercise it, mother just went wild over it—cooing

at it as if it had been a baby. I think she has always resented us in her heart, as she resented that little child with the flower. She'd rather have had childless luxury and poodles. She made me go into this. I was so hopeless by the time she had finished talking that I didn't care."

"I know, I know, dear," Cynthia whispered. She was softly stroking and caressing Barbara's masses of black hair.

"Then when Party began to notice me and to talk about my eyes and my hair and what he called my 'natural poetry,' I felt so proud. He has often used phrases and thoughts I've expressed—even in his public work." There was a forlorn pride in this still. "And when he began to talk about love—oh, Cynthia, I was just so—so—grateful that I loved

him, because he had made me feel I wasn't an ugly, hopeless thing."

"Oh, Barbara, dearest, you're not! You're not!"

"Yes, I am. Because, you see, he was only making a fool of me. I ought not to care. The sort of woman he wanted me to be wouldn't. I found out, by the very same love he called 'free,' that marriage isn't just a silly old idea and a slavery set up by people who didn't understand love; but that it grew out of love. Love demands it. You know, I thought Party was good and true, and had very sincere ideals,



Standing erect on his log out in midstream, a man rode down the tumbling flood with the drive.

even if they were so different from what I'd been taught. I had to believe he was good and fine or I wouldn't have loved him. That's the only kind of man I'd want to love. And now no man like that would look at me. It's not just. It's wicked and cruel. I shouldn't be to blame. I knew nothing. But I have to bear it, and I alone have to pay for it—to the end of my life."

In response to caresses, she nestled against Cynthia's breast. "Maybe it wouldn't have been so, if *we* had been intimate, you and I. I didn't know you

could be so kind and loving, Cynthia. But I suppose mother wouldn't have liked you to make a fuss over any one but her. I'm so tired, Cynthia, dear. I'm so tired."

At last she sank down on the pillows. She was worn out with her griefs and her confessions, and the struggles of reason to find the why and, perhaps, therefrom, a cure. The tired brain and weakened body slipped away into sleep. Cynthia went to the door and looked out. About a city block's distance lay the river. It was shrouded in mists. A thick gray fog lay low upon Mandalek. Here and there through it, as from the windows of this house, there gleamed a lamp or candle flame. In the denseness over the river, torch lights moved. In the ebb and flow of the fog, she could see the townsfolk gathered on the bank; some still held lanterns.

She glanced back at her sister. Barbara was in a heavy sleep. Cynthia drew her cloak about her and went out, hatless, into the road that led to the stream. Somewhere in that throng was the husband she had doubly, trebly wronged; the husband who had secretly gathered up her maimed and bleeding young sister and carried her to a place of shelter—even to the surest shelter of all, his own uncondemning, unpatronizing brotherliness.

CHAPTER XIV.

None paid any attention to her as she came among the group and upon a scene so different from anything she had ever known that, for a while, it held her speechless and incogitant, merely seeing.

The river, proud of its molten spring powers, swirled headlong through its channel from below a dark object that looked to Cynthia like a low bridge without arching top or rails. The fog made the dam's outlines uncertain. Just

under the point of bank on which Mandalek was poised, somewhat like a huge, flopping, unready sea gull, the river took a sudden awkward turn and narrowed; and here a wagon bridge had been swung across it. The arch of the bridge was perceptible and appeared strangely high and lowering in the fog mass. The eyes of the townsfolk were fixed on a rude peaked structure that rose out of the stream almost directly in front of the village and between the dam and the wagon bridge.

The jam of logs lifted, like some primitive clansman's battle tower, out of the surge of white waters. A tower with sentries it was, for the rivermen with their peavies moved, stood, ran, and leaped over the great bulwarks of it. The lights came from the lanterns of the other crew of men working about the dam, and testified to the night's labor.

To Cynthia the sight brought wonder and awe. To the watchers on the bank, who knew, it told a tale of business rivalry, of hatreds maintained from the days when Jens Rigel, the "big man" in lumber, and Ulrick Arvidsen, then only a white-water birler, had come into their first conflict over the bit of government timberland beyond Mandalek, which Arvidsen had acquired just when Rigel & Co. were about to add to their wealth by secretly denuding it of its perfect pine. That had been the beginning of the rise of the "boy king of timber."

A river in spring is a wild thing and mischievous; it is more than ready to take an ill suggestion from madmen to lock and batter the driving logs of a business antagonist and sweep his faithful crew into the riverman's grave, ever open and ever singing a welcome for him. The water is wicked and always willing to take the whole blame of an unexpected drop in the stream and a jam, or a broken dam that, ere the

dark came on, was sound and strong for its massive work of shouldering back the hurling freshet. When men fall to fighting each other for the timber wealth—remembering, moreover, the days when the recently crowned monarch of the lumber realm was glad of his day's pay from his rival's affluent store—the freshet may be tempted to deeds no man dare name. Hate is let loose as the churning floods, and life is but a chip in the froth of it.

"If the dam holds——" A man near Cynthia spoke.

"Aye. If the jam breaks first——"

"They can't save that bridge nohow," another man interrupted the second speaker.

"Ulrick will save the dam. Arvidsen's luck. Recollect when he saved the dam in the spring of nineteen hundred?" The tone implied the clodman's blind faith in the unvarying victory of the man who has risen.

"Aye. And Kåre Arvidsen's on the jam, and Knud also. Erik's on the bridge, and 'Big' Jonson, too."

"Little Jorge Tonners is on the dam. He'll be a great man, little Jorge. He found the break in the dam. He saw Jens Rigel's man, 'Red Irish,' go up the bank in the moonlight. Right away he ran to the dam."

So they told each other facts they all knew, because there are times when even fearless and silent men seek the relief of speech. Their foreign accent was very slight; the American tongue had become their native speech early in childhood. They spoke English more carefully than do the American-born of a like station in life.

"Twelve yar now, Jens Rigel, he say ev'ry sprang: 'Dis yar I got you, Ulrick.' Maybe dis yar he make it?"

It was the proprietor of Ole's Hotel who had joined the group. The first speaker replied, without looking at him:

"Maybe not."

There was silence again for a space.

"Now they blast it," a man said.

He stepped aside for a woman who came through the crowd and past him, to the edge of the bank. She was large and broad and as blond as the morning. She wore a gray linen dress to her stout ankles, and a royal-blue kerchief bound her sand-yellow hair. Her eyes were a deep, brilliant azure. Their expression was steady and calm, and she stood there placidly quiet; but Cynthia felt that there was a tensivity under the calm. The woman's eyes fixed their gaze on the dam, nor ever wavered from it. Cynthia's attention was taken for the moment by a child, which toddled up behind the woman, caught at her apron, and tumbled itself down into the grass by her feet, grasping happily at the clumps of sapphire speedwell and tiny white flowers that rimmed the river.

Looking back upon the scene of battle, she saw men running and leaping from the jam and swinging to the banks across the tumbling logs that flanked the great tower of timber. There was a roar that seemed to reverberate through all the high mud bank under Mandalek. The mighty beams of the turret plunged, end on, upward and through the gray air, and hurled forward, diving and crashing and seething into the current. The center of the huge pack crimped and boughed forward; the whole shook and groaned and tottered like some proud, aged monarch brought, resisting, to his knees. Then came dissolution. The piney bone and sinew of that battlemented monarch were cast forth like splinters, as the backed-up waters were liberated and rushed forth with scream and thunder along their own highway, bearing on the fallen forest—with songs like the bass strings of a thousand cellos striking and echoing in unison, as the timbers pushed upon each other, rolled, and pounded in the great drive.

Standing erect on his log out in mid-

stream, where the white waters flashed through the cracks of the round and whirling timber flooring that covered the face of the river, a man rode down the tumbling flood with the drive. He was a tall man with sand-yellow hair.

"Knud Arvidsen's crazy—like Ulrick," a man said. "He'll ride past Rigel's town—you see—and he'll throw him a good curse and a laugh."

"Ulrick never laughed when he threw a curse."

"Aye. Ulrick's black like his father."

The men who had broken the jam went up and downstream. Some hurried along the bank to the dam. The gray of dawn had turned to a pearl white; the light was come. Cynthia knew that in that group near the dam was the husband she had come out to find, that she might give him humblest love and gratitude and a wondrous news; yet she never stirred from her foothold among the group of watchers.

There was a loud shout and a scattering commotion up the river, and the men about her surged up the bank toward the sound of havoc. The women stood still, and Cynthia Arvidsen stayed among them. Whether by her own long-dormant instinct, or by the influence of the women, she was absorbing the primal law of the sexes—that faithful women watch and wait and pray and work in women's way, in their own places, while their men do the work of men for the world of both. She did not understand what was taking place up the stream, or what it portended, but she felt that the atmosphere was taut with danger.

"Hans er riket og magten og aeren i al evighet!"

The woman with the sand-yellow hair under her royal-blue kerchief spoke. Cynthia could not understand the words, but she knew that the voice was the voice of prayer. Before her eyes the gray wall, where the men labored and shouted and the forgotten lights

still burned, slipped down into the current. The freed torrent plunged, roaring, downward, and the flowing stream rose to meet it and the floating timbers jerked and upended, crashed and locked and sought wickedly for another place to jam. They crossed and climbed upon one another, but the flood kept them moving. They swept onward, like crude tertiary monsters, and charged upon the bridge. Alert and sure, Knud Arvidsen raced over the heaving timbers, and gained the shore ere the advancing wall of water, which had ended the dam, was upon him. The bridge was alive with men to protect it, by warring on the high-floating logs with their peavies.

Cynthia's eyes still strained the way of the blond woman's gaze. She must look, but she had neither intellectual nor emotional comprehension of what she saw. It was too big for her. On that river bank she had stood and looked into infinity, as it seemed to her. She had seen things in nature and in human men never dreamed of in all her little life. She had seen how the wealth she enjoyed was made, by men who played with death as a kitten plays with a ball. To a man of this caliber had she gone in a mockery of marriage, to fatten on the earnings he had wrested from earth and water at such a risk. She felt as little and helpless as the child that played in the grass near her, seizing and plucking the bright-blue speedwell, all ignorant of the titanic battle being waged under the flower-grown bank.

"Jeg tror at Gud er almaegtig Liv."

Could those brilliant, deep eyes of the Norse woman have foreseen the short leap of Jorge Tonners and the up-ending of the log under him, as it tossed him off like a snapped twig? The blond-haired giant, whom Cynthia had marked as he came up after the breaking of the jam, ran by with a coil of rope. There was a shout—it might

have been of protest. Cynthia saw a man hurtle forward into the maelstrom. The blond-haired giant whirled his rope and cast it, and repeated. Cynthia was watching the man who had jumped. Compelling the boiling logs to give him flooring, he seemed to hover low over the water like a black-winged bird. He swooped, and the blond giant threw the rope. There was a wild huzza from the crowd on the bank as the man came shoreward with Jorge Tonners on his shoulders.

It was no ordinary achievement or the watchers would not have shouted; for, let it be remembered, the impossible is the ordinary to these men who follow the lumberjack's calling, one of the most dangerous among the labors of men.

"Kjaerligheten bringer intet ondt. Gud er Kjaerlighet. 'Om nogen holder mit ord, skal han aldrig i evighet se doden.'"

Then it came to Cynthia that the praying woman was the mother of Jorge Tonners, the lad who had discovered the injury to the dam and outstayed all safety at his post; for she saw that her whole countenance was lifted with a holy thankfulness, and that her speed-well eyes were wet as they turned upon the men who now came down the bank carrying the boy. Cynthia watched to see how she would greet the son who had been snatched from death, and saw with amazement that she did not turn her head as he was borne past her. Another woman ran to him, crying quietly with joy, and went with the half-conscious burden into the nearest shack. Then Cynthia saw the four men coming, whom the praying woman watched.

Knud Arvidsen came first along the narrow path, beside a shorter man with heavy black brows and iron-gray hair. Then came the blond giant, the tallest man Cynthia had ever seen. His hair and beard were golden; his eyes, which impressed her even at that moment,

were large and placid, yet astonishingly prescient, and a very vivid blue in color. His rope was over his shoulder. The woman could wait no longer. She ran forward. The giant stepped aside, and Cynthia saw that the fourth man was Ulrick Arvidsen. His black hair dripped about his face, and his dark shirt, slicked to his massy body by the wet plunge, glistened upon him like the skin of a dolphin. Her knees went weak and she sank down by the child in the grass. None noticed her. The crowd surged forward for the better sight of Selma Arvidsen taking her first-born into her arms. They left the river path and turned down the road. The child scrambled up, with its hands full of the blue flowers, and trotted after them, calling:

"Käre! Käre!"

The blond giant turned back and picked her up. Cynthia rose and followed slowly after her husband and his kin, unperceived. The men who had spoken the slightly accented English walked behind her. They were joined by two riverjacks—Irish, evidently, if she might judge from a brogue as thick as fog.

"Ulrick was always crazy," one of the men was saying. "He had to be crazy to make that jump and get away with it. He hadn't a chance. Why, man, she boiled! No man could stand on them logs. No man could get Jorge Tonners out of that water."

"Arvidsens' luck," this with a brogue.

"Aye, Ulrick's crazy; and he's got the Arvidsens' luck. But that's not enough to make him jump for Jorge Tonners and get him."

"D'ye think he's ha'nted?" one of the Irishmen asked laughingly.

"Did you see Selma Arvidsen praying on the bank? Since when the logs jammed and the dam was found weak and every man said the bridge must go and Ulrick would lose his logs—since then Selma Arvidsen's been praying and

saying there'd be no harm come to Ulrick nor to Mandalek."

"Ye think she can call the spirits to him?"

"I think all the Arvidsens believe in Selma's praying. Selma's a strange woman. I think when Ulrick knows she's praying, he's not afraid to go after Jorge Tonners."

"Ulrick's crazy! He don't believe the river can hurt him."

"Sure, Ulrick's crazy. He'd jump after a dog that served him. I wish we could go down and burn Jens Rigel's mill. But there's too much law on the river these days. You should hear the old men tell about how they used to do it on the Saginaw!"

A voluble Irish curse cleft the atmosphere, and was sustained by angry rumbles from half a dozen throats.

"Jens Rigel's ortymobile! Ye bet there's too much law on this river! Him darin' to show the evil face av him in Mandalek after a thrick like that! If 'twas in the good old days, we'd sink him in the drive."

There was a large red car near the Arvidsens' gate, still souging and sighing as if the monster were striving for breath after a long, rapid journey. A gray-haired man sat at the wheel. His face, too, was gray—with the blanching of hatred. Beside him sat a red-haired woman with slanting, sapphire eyes. She was swathed in blue veils and a blue silk cloak. There were little lines at the corners of her mouth and her eyes were lewd and thwarted and hungry and hating as they looked down on Ulrick Arvidsen standing hatless in his gateway. As Cynthia drew near, she heard Arvidsen saying, in his even tones:

"It's good of you to come here to offer assistance, Jens Rigel. But Arvidsens' luck has held good to-day. We haven't lost a man or a log. I don't dare pass your good offer along to my

crew, for fear they'd take it as an insult."

The car lurched under the driver's rage-shaking hand. Mrs. Rigel was looking at Cynthia. It was plain that she recognized her. Her thin red lips parted in a smile that showed tiny, pointed, very white teeth.

"We women understand so little of your business wars. We love peace and friendship. Mrs. Arvidsen and I must bind you men in a truce, don't you think so? I have seen your wife in town several times, but never met her." She made a gesture of invitation toward Cynthia.

Ulrick turned and saw his wife. Perhaps Barbara, who stood in the garden near him, had already mentioned her presence, for he showed no surprise at the sight of her. He stepped out of the gateway and said shortly:

"Go in!"

She entered the doors of Arvidsen's Town obediently.

Jens Rigel swore as he turned his car around; and the laugh of Cadet Blue trickled out like a thin stream of poisoned water. There was a clamor of pounding feet on the earth. Down the road came twenty men of the ax crew. They were big fellows, dark-skinned and black-haired. They followed their leader, a hulking French half-breed without a nose, and with the spike-nail tattoo on his wicked visage and a loosened under lip that swelled down to his chin, disclosing a few yellow fangs.

Knud Arvidsen, swinging himself into the path of their fury, shouted to them an order of peace with some irresistible jest. Instantly, with a roar of mirth, they changed their militant intent. With whoops and jeers they broke into a trot and swept down the street upon Rigel's automobile, singing one of the proudest and improperest ditties in their untranslatable patois. Jens Rigel cursed impotently and flung the car



Apparently her husband's kin accepted her as a woman of the Arvidsens and considered no other identity for her.

forward. They fled along the dusty road; the defeated hater with the cankering jealousy in his heart—that was a thousand times bitterer for the knowledge that Arvidsen had not wishfully caused it—and the pale-faced woman

with the lewd, frustrated eyes and the thin, evil laugh. The breeds hammered down the highway after them, chanting:

*"Je suis Jean Conteau.
(Voilà Jean Conteau!)
Je suis Jean le beau.*

(*Yah, lah, est-il beau!*)
Sur les bords de l'eau
Je coupe le bois.
(Il mange le bois,
Ce Jean furieux!)
Connais-tu ma mie?
(Là! nous la connaissons!)
Connais-tu ma mie?
(Oh, oui, oh, si, si, si!)
Ses cheveux sont noirs.
Je la cherche ce soir.
(Et moi, et moi, et aussi moi!)"

The excruciating humor of the ballad depends on the number of jacks who join in the chorus; other verses are best unprinted. Thus did Ulrick Arvidsen's lumberjacks mock Jens Rigel and Cadet Blue out of Mandalek.

CHAPTER XV.

In the great kitchen that Ulrick had built as part of his second addition to Arvidsen's Town, three Swedish maids baked flat bread and boiled coffee and cracked a score of eggshells, while two more maids and Erik's wife set the long, snowy table in the adjacent room under the directions of the mistress of the house. Selma had put off her drab linen for a frock of silk to match the royal-blue kerchief, which she had readjusted, as a morning cap, upon her flaxen braids.

It was plain that no Paquin or Worth, but Selma herself, had designed her gown. The bodice, but for a little frilling, fitted smoothly over her large, curved bosom, the ample skirt was short; and the laced girdle did nothing at all in the matter of confining her waist. She suggested some chieftainess of a rugged age preparing food to celebrate the meeting of the clans. Sometimes she sang a snatch in a clear, strong voice: "*Aere vaere Gud i det hoieste.*" It was a chant of deep, reverent content.

In the front room Cynthia and Barbara stood at the window, watching the strange sights of this undreamed world on which their first little morning of

understanding was lifting. They held hands tightly, like children. Ulrick, who had doffed his dolphin skin in Knud's house, and put on a dry suit of "jack's uniform," was talking to his brothers, Knud, Erik, and the youngest, Olaf—who was about Ledyard's age—out in the garden. Erik, too, was blond, while Olaf's hair inclined to a reddish brown. Ulrick and his father were evidently the only dark ones in the family. Käre entered from his section of the enormous house. He came toward Cynthia frankly with hands outstretched.

"You are Ulrick's wife and I am his brother. We are friends."

"Oh, yes," she answered, blushing slightly. He smiled. She was struck again by his eyes. All the Arvidsens but Ulrick had eyes of vivid blue. Ulrick's were violet, almond-shaped, and unusually large. Käre's eyes were like Selma's—pure, clear, prescient, mystic without suggesting the occult. It seemed to Cynthia as if the spirit of sky and sea dwelt in them, and a kindness as simple as the light. He turned to Barbara.

"My mother tells me that you will remain with us for some time, Miss Lee. We are very glad. Perhaps we shall keep you always, to add to our luck. It is several generations, so my father has said, since there has been a black-haired woman among the Arvidsens." There was a remote, unfamiliar tenderness in his penetrative glance, as he added: "Mandalek has much beauty. Hearts mend soon here. My mother says that there will be no breakfast for half an hour. Will you come for a walk and take a look at our river? She is very beautiful, we think; though she is willful and makes trouble often. Will you come?"

Barbara moved to go with him, and there was a lightening of the shadow in her black eyes. The tiny child whom Cynthia had seen by the river pushed the door open and entered, carrying,

with great care, a small white pitcher, handleless and cracked, in which bloomed a bunch of the blue speedwell. With slow, methodical labor she succeeded in climbing upon a chair and depositing her nosegay in the center of the table. Then she climbed down and departed gravely upon other business. The faces of the two girls, so unsatisfactory according to Mrs. Cato's standards, were not unbeautiful as they watched the diminutive flower goddess. The blond giant smiled and said:

"She is Erik's. He has three. Selma thinks that she has special household duties because she is named for my mother." Then, seeing Olaf trying to steal unnoticed across the room, he called him: "Come here and meet your sister. This is our pigeon. He lives in the odd little coop on top of Arvidsen's Town. It looks as much like a bell tower as a dovecote, but we cannot call Olaf 'bell,' because he has no clapper—no tongue!"

The stammering, blushing pigeon broke from his brother's hold and fled up the long stairs to his cote.

Käre and Barbara set out toward the river. Knud and Erik came in and greeted their sister-in-law and said they were glad to see "Ulrick's wife." His father, a shorter man and swarthy like Ulrick, came also and welcomed her kindly as "Ulrick's wife." Apparently her husband's kin accepted her as a woman of the Arvidsens and considered no other identity for her.

When Ulrick came to her at last, Selma also entered from the kitchen. So it happened that his first words to her were in introduction of his mother. This was fortunate, because Cynthia's tongued-tied reserve was on her again as she remembered the scene they had had on the previous evening. As for Ulrick, he was very far from thinking that the reason for her presence in Mandalek had anything to do with him. He supposed that, in some way, she

had known of Barbara's journey and had come to show sisterly kindness. It might have taken them weeks to come to the truth but for Selma. The chill hurt was in his bearing and voice as he said:

"Cynthia, this is my mother. Mother, will you make my wife welcome?"

Cynthia turned timidly toward the elder woman. Selma's penetrative gaze, so like Käre's, met hers. Selma saw the new yearning in the wide, brilliant, pale-gray eyes, round which the tear traces lingered. Perhaps she saw, too, the quiver of intensity in the lips which did not know how to speak. She looked from one to the other, then she said:

"Why my son think you love him not?" And added almost immediately: "You love him much." She bent and kissed her daughter-in-law softly on the cheek.

Selma was authority to Ulrick. His grave, hurt expression changed into one of hope; he made an involuntary step toward his wife. Cynthia threw herself into his arms and cried to her heart's content. Forgetting all Mrs. Cato's instructions in the matter of distance and dignity, she clung there, held her mouth to his shamelessly, and reiterated the lover's immortal phrase of three words with the passionate joy of dumb lips set free. Selma Arvidsen, unseen, went back to her great kitchen and her serving maids and delayed breakfast, continuing the while her fragmentary chanting of "Glory to God in the Highest." Well might Selma Arvidsen send her morning song up to the Throne, for had she not given four strong servitors and one master craftsman to the world?

"I ran after you to take you away from that red-headed blue woman!" Cynthia confessed with a brazen pride. That ended speech for some moments, for Ulrick's arms tightened about her with such crushing strength that breath-

ing was only barely possible. Presently she tried to thank him for his care of Barbara. He stammered over that a little.

"You see, I couldn't tell you it was Babs who had thrown herself into my arms, without giving her away. And I didn't see how it would do any good to tell any of you women. Things were pretty bad with our young sister to-day. Thank God I did go to that Sample person's fool bric-a-brac lunch—or she might not have come to me with her troubles. Barbara ought not to be going round with that sort, all unprotected by any knowledge or wisdom or real principle.

"I don't want you to think I am speaking disrespectfully of mother-in-law in making this little criticism. I think a lot of her. I don't know any one I just *enjoy* as I enjoy her. And she's always putting it over on me, like she did the first day I met her—with those crape strings flying. But I think she has put it over on you girls a little too much—past a joke. One's mother has about twenty-five years' start of one—you don't begin to look into your own education much before twenty-five—and all of that time she's been doing one of two things—either building up your character and equipping you for life, or making a slave of you to her own will.

"That seems to me where most women get mixed about doing good to others, including their children. They use tyranny to impress their personal ideas, and to restrict and supervise, instead of teaching principles and letting the principles work out through individual thinking and living. That's the only way to get sturdy growth. If Barbara had been trained to have a free mind, she wouldn't have been hypnotized by this Sample person."

Cynthia was thinking upon the fact that Ulrick had been obliged to take Barbara's case in hand himself, however

he might blunder at it, because neither of the women of Barbara's family was large enough in the spiritual wisdom of love, to deal with the stricken girl in the way of reconstruction. His action in regard to her sister she likened to his leap into the frothing river to rescue a lad whose name, even, he hardly knew. It was the instinct of the life maker, the seed sower, who is the life protector, also—the male instinct to make life, to give life in order to save life, in peace, in battle, or in the sudden dangers of city and field, with no thought but for the life. At last she spoke of that, the leap for Jorge Tonners; and she spoke as women must, who can never comprehend that instinct in men—which seems to them at once so large and noble and so dread; because it can turn from the sweets of personal love and life and risk all for the abstract life, for the saving of friend, stranger, and even enemy.

"I shouldn't have praise of that kind," he answered. "I know no better death to die than with my logs in the river. But not yet." He smiled at her. "You'd better not suggest to mother that there was any danger to me while she was on the bank praying." The expression in his eyes was both tender and whimsical. "We boys believe firmly that mother has the most to do with Arvidsens' luck. She isn't educated in a booky way, but she's wonderfully well acquainted with her Creator. And her intuitions have what I call a spiritual accuracy."

She answered him gravely:

"I see where you got what Barbara called your 'peasant views of women.' She wouldn't say that now. Oh, my poor Barbara!" The tears were near again.

"Barbara will be all right. This thing will heal up. The worst of it is past and done with. There's a right kind of life for Barbara, and no reason why she shouldn't work up to it. I con-

fess I'd rather have women standing praying on the national banks, too, while men shape the currency bill." His eyes twinkled again. "I'm afraid mother-in-law would find that occupation rather tame; if she had to make a choice, she'd rather be a law-maker. Mother and Käre will be good for Barbara. Mother's atmosphere is helpful when you've got some tough question to work out. Käre can talk to her. He reads a lot. He's educated. You know my brothers are not just rivermen now, though you'd think it from this morning's work. Except Knud. He's mad for the river. I guess he'll live and die on it, just a riverjack."

He drew her tightly to him again and kissed her softly till the look that he sought came into her eyes.

"I wish I hadn't said all those harsh things to you last night. I know you weren't to blame for what you did in Josieville. And it's turned out for happiness, after all."

"Oh," she broke out, with resentment against herself and the women of her family, "how can you still go on thinking of women as you do—with that ideal of us—after your experience with me and mother and Barbara? We've all been so weak and self-seeking and petty and untrue!"

"I guess we men are pretty obstinate in our ideals of women. The mist never puts out the torch for us. But, *honest*, as Ledyard says, I've got no kick. I guess mother-in-law did the best she knew, and I owe her an everlasting gratitude for having given you to me, no matter what her motives were." He was tilting back her chin, searching her face as if he could never see enough of it.

"There's a mystery in passion. Most of the stuff talked about it isn't true. Just to have you to care for and caress—you're so quiet and cool and gentle. You rest me and make me strong. You're the inspiration and the reward

and the light to see all the rest by. You've seemed nearest to me and most mine because you were so remote and unlike. Perhaps that's the touch of the mystic in my nationality," he mused. "We're not city men, we Norsemen. Sometimes I think it's timber sap we've got in our veins for blood. The strength of the earth is our passion. We're rovers still, as we've always been, seeking new soil to set our strength in and grow a people. That's why I dared to break my ship on your beach. From the first view of you, you've been to me the most beautiful thing I ever looked at—"

"Oh—oh—Ulrick!" she cried, almost sobbing in her excitement. "Oh, could you think of me so—when I'm not even pretty? Oh, if only I looked like mother—just for *your* sake!" It was a despairing cry, this last.

He smothered a laugh against her hair.

"I'm glad you don't! Mother-in-law's certainly highly ornamental, but I wouldn't compare her style of looks with *yours*." He spoke as if the mere suggestion were sacrilege! "You don't only please my sight; you satisfy my mind's eye, too. My whole being revels in you, as it does in the woods in a perfect morning. There's a purity and sweetness in your face—so clear—it's like alabaster living, if that could be. Last night when I'd left you, after all that bitter talk, I knew I couldn't change. I couldn't give up my ideal of you. My light would always be in your hands; and I would always be climbing through the fogs to you—to you."

Her husband saw her as beautiful! Rejoicing leaped through her, despite the shock that left her blankly aghast at his blasphemous belittlement of the divine charms of Mrs. Cato. Her fears passed, as he continued to caress her lips and to look tenderly into her eyes—the gods having hurled no thunderbolt to avenge Venus. She raised to

him lips and hands and heart again speechlessly.

The sound of the Arvidsens returning for breakfast startled her from his arms. She went to the door. The red sun was lifting above the forests on the far side of the river, like a huge burning flame in a bowl, thrust upward from the heart of the earth. Its warm blood hue shone through the lingering mists of morning, flashed wide wings of fire across the opal dome, and set a great, still light in the opened portals of the new day.

Cynthia Arvidsen, looking back at her husband from the cottage doorway, felt a rich and passionate joy as she thought of the fullness of love that he had poured out on her, and of the gift that was hers to bestow when the months were completed. She would not tell him first news of its coming now, in the ardent glory of day; but in the starry hour, with his face on her breast, she would give him his share of her hope for his benediction ere he slept. Knowing nothing of her secret, he came to her, brushing his shaggy head against her shoulder, his eyes full of mischief.

"I've got a wonderful idea about a new honeymoon for us. We'll send mother-in-law and Aunt Polly off with a trunk of new clothes to do a tour

of the fashionable resorts. Who knows? Maybe Aunt Polly will be picked up and married when mother-in-law isn't looking—if that ever happens. Only if Aunt Polly casts her eyes on any one, you're likely to get a new father."

"Oh, Ulrick!" The attempted reproof failed. Her laughter sounded to him as joyous and clear as a brook released from the winter's ice.

Knud, whose face was always a crinkle of mischief, his father, and Käre and Barbara arrived simultaneously. Erik's two other children came down the stairs after their father, followed by Olaf, whose bashful glances at his sister-in-law, and blushing cheeks, indicated that nothing less compelling than hunger could have lured the shy pigeon from his cote.

Selma Arvidsen, with the little Selma clinging to her skirt, stood in the door of the breakfast room and smiled with satisfaction upon her group. The love light in her eyes seemed to quicken and to linger upon her black-haired first-born, who looked so like her husband. She motioned toward the immense table, snowy with perfect linen and fairly bending under the fragrant dishes that the neat Swedish handmaids had just placed upon it.

"Now, come eat," said the mother.





Glory Minus

By Wallace Irwin

ILLUSTRATED BY H.V. MAYER

ON the U. S. cruiser *Susan*,
Settin' idly on the throttle,
Loafed Chief Engineer Van Duzen,
Drinkin' grape juice from a bottle.

And he says, "If war was handy,
Guns all limbered for a fight,
Could we work without our brandy?"
Quoth the gunner's mate, "We might."

"Would we lust as much for slaughter,
Shootin' Mexicans and Japs,
If we wet our souls with water?"
Quoth the gunner's mate, "Perhaps."

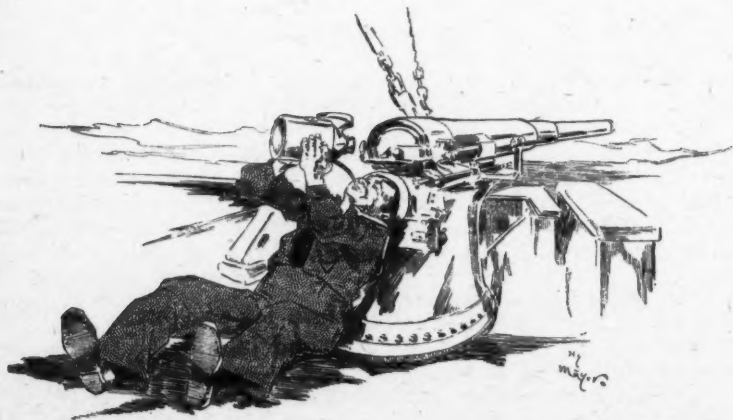
"And suppose we quit victorious—
If we opened lemonade
Would our glory seem as glorious?"
Quoth the gunner, "I'm afraid

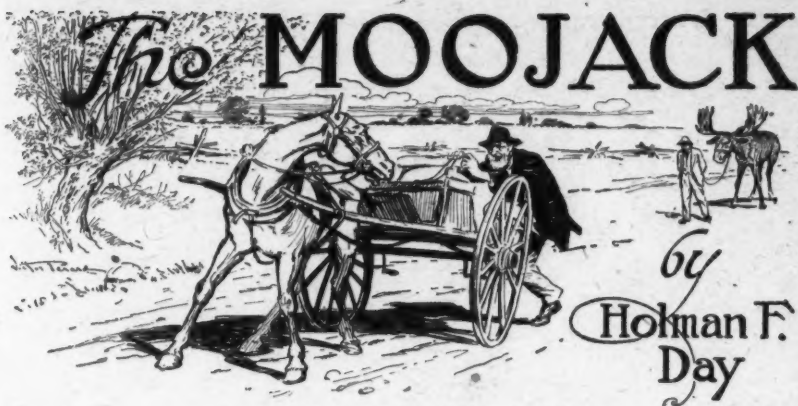
"That Catawba unfermented
Fires nor gun nor heart nor head.
It is quite un-pre-ce-dent-ed
To be thus," the gunner said.

"For a feeling patriotic
Should be anything but slow.
War is hell, and hell's neurotic—
Can it thrive on H₂O?

"And the saddest thing I muse on
And the government accuse:
If there's nothing to enthuse on,
How the deuce can one enthuse?"

After which intense recitals
Rose the gunner, quite serene,
And encouraged of his vitals
With a quart of kerosene.





ILLUSTRATED BY VICTOR PERARD

MR. DANIEL BREED, having in view ahead of him, at last, his goal—the grounds of the Cuxabexis Gents' Driving Association—pulled up a sort of Gothic ruin on four legs—a cadaverous, wabby old horse, which had been feebly pulling him along in a dusty gig. There was no one in sight, and he climbed stiffly down from the gig and proceeded to do what he termed “a little genteel gingering up.”

Mr. Breed was headed for certain purlieus on the outside of the race track—a birch grove known as “Shifters' Row.” He had journeyed hither from a similar resort on the outside of the Sylvan Glade Camp-meeting Association. Mr. Breed had become a passionate devotee of the fascinating pursuit known as “hoss swapping.” He was driving his latest acquisition, secured the day before at the camp meeting, and it had been borne in on him that there were several points about his new charger which were not all that could be desired.

Mr. Breed pulled a huge bunch of grass beside the highway and swabbed off the sweat and dust from the venerable beast's slatted sides as best he could. He set up the checkrein two holes, giving a duck bend to the horse's

pipestem neck. He produced a six-inch length of strap iron from his pocket and bent it over the animal's palpitating nostrils; Mr. Breed had got hold of a “whistler” and had discovered that even a slight amount of exercise developed the heaves in a most discouraging fashion. The strap iron softened the vigor of the exhaust. Mr. Breed concealed the contrivance under an extra bridle strap.

From a little box under the road cart's seat, he got out a small board, to which had been fastened the handle of an old currycomb; the board was studded thickly with shoe pegs. Holding the writhing and resentful horse firmly by the headstall, and growling commands to “Whoa, blast ye!” Mr. Breed began to tap the assembled shoe pegs over the animal's anatomy. Soon a very satisfying plumpness appeared in the trail of the pegs, caused by myriads of little blisters which the hair concealed. It was Mr. Breed's deft and instantaneous process for giving the attractive contour usually acquired through a persistent diet of oats.

Then he applied gun oil with the palm of his hand, slicking the horse's coat down nicely.

He met with a surprise during this

part of his gingering-up process. The oil soaked off a lot of brown paint which had covered a liberal expanse of the horse's legs in the region of the knees. The exposed surface was bare of hair, and was of a rather striking blue tint.

"Must have been using croton oil to take down knee swellings," observed Mr. Breed sagely.

He rose from his knees, sourly surveyed the blue legs, and scowled at the horse, who was giving his new owner no very amiable side glances.

"Why didn't ye keep your color, you cussed old soup bone? That knocks hackenny out of the name I had all picked out for ye. Can't call ye Sylvan King now. Le's see! Well, I can call ye Blue Peter and tell 'em that the color comes from eating so much blue grass in Kentucky. I believed so much about you, when that bing-danged Josephus of a liar unloaded you onto me, that mebbe others can be made to believe a little something. I even believed that critter who swapped ye was a camp-meeting elder, because he wore a white necktie and called ye by a Bible name. I'd better get into some business where so much brain work ain't required. I don't seem to be making no kind of a living nowadays."

Mr. Breed started despondently toward his road cart, intending to mount.

"I've plumped ye and have got ye slicked off middling fair," he commented disgustedly, "but ye ain't showing no spirit. There's more up-and-get-there in a tin teakettle."

The next instant Mr. Breed had occasion to revise his opinions.

The old horse had laid his head back against his shoulders to investigate what fresh form of torture this new owner meditated next. He saw something which the absorbed Mr. Breed did not see, and he snorted, crouched, and leaped. He was precipitately transformed into a rearing Bucephalus. Mr.

Breed grabbed at the reins and was dragged into the ditch, over boulders, up a grassy incline, through the high-way bushes; and the mad flight did not stop until horse, gig, and proprietor of the outfit were pocketed in a fence corner, where the horse fell down. Mr. Breed promptly sat on the animal's head.

"No, it ain't spirit—it can't be—he ain't got it," gasped the owner, staring into the horse's eyes. "He's got fits and blind staggers. And I'll prob'ly dis-kiver hoss ail, spavins, epizootic, and ingrowing chilblains. He's got everything in him except pedigree and speed. I've been handed a fine package—due to getting fascinated by a white necktie."

But a moment later Mr. Breed heard a noise, peered through the bushes, and beheld something that exculpated the horse.

A man was trudging past in the direction of the race track, leading a huge animal with a bulbous nose, spreading horns, and a tangled mane. It was a bull moose.

"What ye mean by scaring the daylight out of a high-spirited, five-hundred-dollar trot hoss?" shrilled Mr. Breed. "I'm going to sue ye!"

"—You won't get nothing," stated the man in the highway. He was dolefully indifferent. "I hain't got a cent in my pocket. I hain't had anything to eat for two days except hand-outs that I've begged. Before you start suing for damages and paying lawyers, you'd better take a little heed to what might happen. You may get this moose wished onto ye."

He tramped along, and the moose followed at the end of a rope. It was a mere framework of an animal. It was mangy, and seemed barely able to crawl on its stiltlike legs.

Mr. Breed waited in surly mood until the moose was out of sight. Then he derricked up Blue Peter, after he had unbuckled the harness. The repressive

strap iron had been lost from the nostrils, and the horse was whistling vociferously.

"Got something that's consid'able high pressure, there," observed somebody from the road, interrupting Mr. Breed in his task of arranging the harness.

Another man had come along. He was leading a jackass who drew a small cart on which was piled a folded tent and its poles.

"When a high-spirited and vallyble hoss gets run over hill and down dale by a cussed old animile that ought to be in the wild woods where he belongs," averred Mr. Breed, hooking the tugs, "there ain't no telling what the excitement will do to him."

"I know heaves when I hear 'em," stated the man in the road.

"Then they've just developed by this hoss's nervous condition. This is the first touch I've heard in him. I'll hunt up that mooseman and massycree him."

"I'll go help you," offered the other. "He just came up behind me and Demosthenes, here, while we was down the road, and scared Demosthenes nigh into conceptions. And when a man has got a ten-thousand-dollar proposition like this"—he fondled the jackass' ears—"he can't afford to have it jippydized, as we used to say at Yale."

Mr. Breed began to lead Blue Peter, palpitating, stumbling, and staggering, back over the rocks to the highway.

"Yes, sir, I consider that there's ten thousand buttoned right up in the brains under these ears," stated the man in the road, not relishing Mr. Breed's indifference when he had stated values.

"I'm something of a liar myself where the hoss kind is concerned," averred the owner of Blue Peter, when he had that pride of the equine race safely back in the highway, "but I believe in sort of spreading amounts around instead of spending it all in one place."

"Don't you realize what I've got here?"

Mr. Breed was examining Blue Peter for nicks that might further reduce his market value, and did not reply.

"Doesn't the name Demosthenes suggest anything to you?" insisted the stranger.

"Never heard of the strain—and this is the first time I ever knowed of pedigree being claimed for a jackass."

"Don't you know that Demosthenes was an orator that lived in Greece two or three thousand years ago?"

"I didn't live there then," said Mr. Breed curtly.

He had just discovered a new feature about Blue Peter that nigh paralyzed him. The animal's luxuriant caudal appendage, Mr. Breed noted, seemed to have been mussed up more or less during that wrestle with the landscape. He took hold of it to straighten it out. The major part of the tail came away in his hands, leaving only a partly denuded stub to which the false tail had been artistically attached.

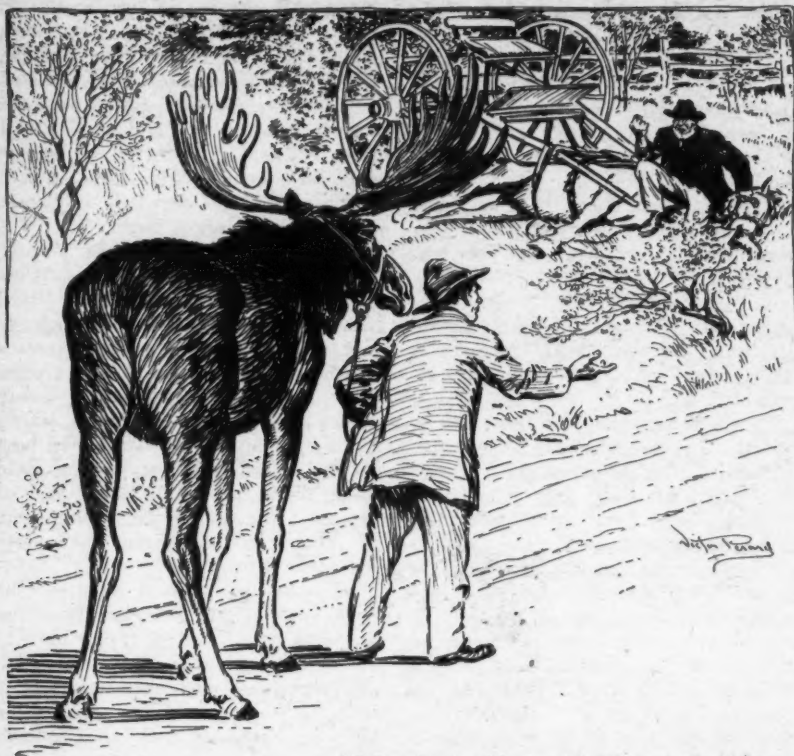
"Carrying out the ancient saying that all is not tail that switches," remarked the gentleman of the jackass, in cheerful tones.

"If it wasn't fifteen miles back to that Sylvan Dale camp meeting, and that I'd have to walk this blue-j'inted old knacker's pride, with a doorknob for a tail, all the way, I'd go back and make that white necktier eat this damnation hunk of hair, glue and all!" raged the victim.

He affixed it as best he could, plaiting it in with the strands of hair on the stub.

"You don't seem to be very much interested in a ten-thousand-dollar proposition," said the other man, after a protracted period of silence, Mr. Breed being very busily engaged on repairs.

"My mind is pretty well took up with my croschay work just now," snapped Mr. Breed over his shoulder. "And



"You won't get nothing," stated the man in the highway.

what ain't took up with croshaying is busy with my troubles."

"I can see plainly that you haven't ever heard of the greatest wonder in the animal kingdom, my friend. This is the wonderful talking jackass."

"The world is full of 'em—most of 'em on two legs."

"Say, are you trying to pick a fight with me?"

"I'm tending to my own business—strickly," stated Mr. Breed. "But if you want to fight, I'll put my time against yours. It'll take my mind off'm my troubles for a little spell."

There was another period of silence. The party with the jackass surveyed

Mr. Breed's broad back and did not appear inclined to accept that opportunity of removing the gentleman's mind from his troubles.

"There's no sense in two gents of a peaceful frame of mind like you and me having a fuss," he said at last. "All I'm trying to tell you is that here you behold the only talking jackass in the wide world. Positively no other. I call him Demosthenes, because his eloquence enthalls the multitude and——"

The stranger, had assumed the barker's tone, and Mr. Breed promptly interrupted him.

"If he's got any kind of a fair command of language, I'll pay ten cents a

minute for all the swearing he'll do for me right here and now."

"I want you to understand that we've got a refined and genteel act here, appealing especially to the élite, and to ladies and children—latter half price."

Mr. Breed stood back to survey his work.

"Let 'er go, once, Demosthenes. Show the gent. Say, 'Dear maw!' Referring to his mother," explained the owner.

But the jackass stood there, stolid and grave and silent. Repeated urging and appeals did not start his voice. Nor did threats. His ears drooped. He trembled.

"Any jackass can say, 'Hee haw'—and that's probably all he can say, and you make 'Dear maw' out of it," scoffed Mr. Breed, evidently determined to believe the word of no other human being from that time on.

"I tell you he can talk," protested the owner. "He's usually a bold and loud talker. But something has happened to him all of a sudden. And I know what it is—that old horned hellion with a Hubbard-squash nose has scared the conversation all out of this poor critter. Look at him tremble? He's been shaking that way ever since we got run off'm the road into the bushes."

"Mebbe it'll all come back to him when he gets ready to ask for his supper," suggested Mr. Breed, with sarcasm. "I've had hosses that wouldn't talk until they got hungry and called for something," he added, climbing onto his gig.

"That one you've got there must be deaf and dumb," retorted the other. "Otherwise, he'd be putting up a great line of talk right about now, if looks are anything to go by."

"What may I call your name?" inquired Mr. Breed.

"You may call it Salutas Trask—seeing that I want to give you the chance to speak the truth once in your life."

"Well, then, Mr. Salutas Trask, I'd like to say that if it wasn't so much trouble to climb down off'm this gig, once I get planted here, I'd come down and cuff your old ears, just to ease the general state of my feelings. But I won't bother." He curved his tongue against the roof of his mouth, uttered a dry "clek!" and urged the old horse away at a stiff-legged walk.

Mr. Trask dragged at the jackass' head and tramped along in the dust behind. Thus he followed Mr. Breed when the latter turned off the highway into the birch grove near the race-track fence. Men loafed there in little groups, a score or so of horses of the variety known generally as "old pelters" leaned languidly against trees which had been gnawed as high as hungry mouths could reach, and in one or two places knots of listeners surrounded men who were actively engaged in arguing which party should pay boot.

In a remote corner of the grove the moose was lunging his great nose into the branches of a tree, trying hard to find a meal for himself. Men were leading kicking and frightened horses away from his vicinity, and were exchanging vigorous remarks with the moose's owner. The owner was announcing with heat that the moose had as much right in that grove as any other animal. He informed listeners that he, Roma Tibb, having met and downed all the wild animals of the forests, wasn't afraid of a bunch of horse jockeys; and being an angular man, with arms like flails and knobs of fists and fierce whiskers, men retired and left him in command of his position. Mr. Trask located himself and his outfit in a hollow near the park fence, as far away from Mr. Tibb's moose as he could get, and Mr. Breed hitched his horse to a tree and sauntered about in search of some gentleman who would be inclined to talk "shift."

Two came and sidled around Blue

Peter and stalked away, with upraised palm disdaining further scrutiny; they would not even pause to roll up the horse's lip for a peek at his teeth. But the third man who came owned a horse with a knocked-down hip and a swollen joint, and evidently considered that almost any kind of a swap would benefit him.

"I don't admit to him being over seven," stated Mr. Breed, promptly checking some opinions the other man was expressing.

"How do you account for his looks, then?" inquired the sarcastic stranger. "Some inner, romantic sorrow that has made him old before his time?"

"Well, he may be eight—possibly nine," admitted Mr. Breed, eying the gentleman in order to estimate by his expression whether this admission was satisfying his doubts.

"Look at them teeth!"

"Ten at the outside," said Mr. Breed, with much decision. "I've took that stand, and I won't back down from it. I don't allow anybody to back me down after I've taken a stand."

He flapped his palm against his out-thrust chest. But his breast suddenly caved in, his shoulders humped up, he cowered. His astonished vis-à-vis turned and looked in the direction of Mr. Breed's frightened and beseeching stare. A woman who was stocky, browned, and muscular strode up.

"So I've located you, have I?" she remarked, in raspy tones. "You've given me a nice chase of it, you ramping and racing old renegade! I've been told to hunt for you among cheap hoss jockeys."

She cast looks of defiant scorn on the men who edged up to listen.

"I don't blame a woman for being mad when a rambling rake has give her the mitten," volunteered the man whose trade with Mr. Breed had been interrupted. "But them of us who ain't to blame don't like——"

"You don't think I'd come chasing this old fool unless I was married to him, do you? I'm married to him, and more's the pity. How a widder left with a good farm ever let a thing like that come around and hornswoggle her into marrying him is more than I can understand, standing here to-day and looking at him. Where's that hay press and them hosses I started you out with, after I'd mortgaged my farm to raise the money to pay for 'em?"

"Well, you see, I——"

"How did you get here into this nest of pirates?"

"I—I drove here with this—this hoss."

"No wonder I've been able to catch you at last if you've got to depend on that thing to get you over the ground! But where's my hay press and my hosses?"

"Now be reasonable and forbearing in a case where a man has been trying to do his best for you," pleaded Mr. Breed, his tones quavering. "I found there wa'n't no kind of prices being paid for hay-pressing these days. I wanted to get the most I could for you out of your property."

"Where's my hay press?" she screamed, advancing on him.

"I swapped for a tin peddler's cart, all stocked. But the tin-and-rag trade ain't what it used to be. I didn't want to lose money for you. If ye get into a line what's on the down grade, get out as quick as ye can; that's my motto," declared Mr. Breed, trying hard to show business perspicacity. "Especially where it's somebody else's money you're handling."

"I ain't going to be able to hold in much longer," she warned shrilly.

"Trade is down in all lines. The papers tell ye so," he whined. "I swapped the cart and went into the hoss business, where there's a chance for a man to use brains and double his money."

"How much money have you got in

your pocket?" she inquired, with acrid tone.

He pulled out a few ragged old bills.

"Here's eight dollars—about all I can make out for you just now," he stammered. "Of course, there are slack times and down grades in the hoss business—but a man with brains can grab in and build up. Now, this hoss, here——"

"Do you dare to claim that hundred-and - forty - year - old Methooslum of a hoss as yours?"

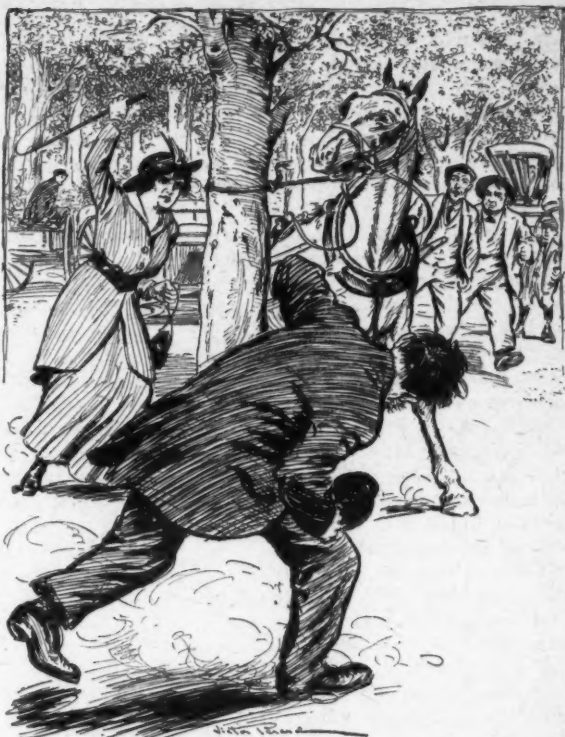
"Look here," he barked, daring to bristle a little, "I've just gone up on that hoss' age, so as to be on the safe side and uphold my boast that I never lied in a hoss trade.

I'll here and now go a step farther and say he may possibly be eleven years old—but twelve to the extent, by jee-criminy! I won't put on another year to satisfy no human, living being."

She pointed a quivering finger at Mr. Breed's outfit.

"And that's the little end of the horn you've come out of, is it? You've swapped my hay press and two good, strong, able hosses down to that, have you?"

She screamed her questions, and High Sheriff Aaron Sproul, who had been warned that pickpockets were operating around the gates of the Gents' Driving Association, heard and left his post of



She grabbed the whip from Mr. Breed's road cart and began to lash that unfortunate speculator around and around the tree.

watchful waiting and came over to investigate the causes that could put such timbre into the female voice.

"Better fight in lower tones," advised a bystander. "Here comes the high sheriff."

"He's coming just in time," shouted the enraged wife. "He's going to keep me from committing a murder, but he can't stop me from doing this."

She grabbed the whip from Mr. Breed's road cart and began to lash that unfortunate speculator around and around the tree to which the old horse was tied. Her fury was blind and careless. Half the wicked blows fell upon the old horse, and he dodged and

crouched and kicked and finally fell, tangled in the harness. She broke the whip across her husband's head, reversed the weapon, and felled him with the hard butt.

Sheriff Sproul found a situation that rather revised his expectation as to what those feminine screams indicated. He found a man kneeling in front of a woman and begging for mercy.

Mr. Breed fixed eager and hopeful gaze on the sheriff's gold badge.

"Arrest her before she beans me ag'in with that whip handle," he pleaded.

"I want this man put into the darkest cell there is in State prison," she countermanded. "He has stole my hay press and two good horses."

But when the sheriff had gathered the facts, he was obliged to inform Mrs. Breed that her spouse was guilty only of breach of trust, and that the criminal law could not be invoked in his case.

"You'll have to settle with him yourself, marm. And seeing that you've got him mellered into a mood where it's going to be easy to handle him from now on, you'd better take him home and tend to his case. Can't have any more rioting around these grounds."

"Me take that mupdoodle home with me? I wouldn't even feed him to a tomcat! It's enough for me to have to go to work and pay off that mortgage with my two hands, without having that old rip setting around, waiting for meals; and he ain't got even enough gumption to split my kindling wood!" She held out her hand and snapped her fingers. "Gimme that eight dollars!"

Mr. Breed obeyed. She flung the wrecked whip in his face and strode away.

"Well," observed Mr. Breed, "I suppose that settles it. And now that I ain't got any wife to work and figger and plan for, I reckon I'll get out of the hoss business and save my brains."

Sheriff Sproul gave him a look that

spoke volumes, and started back to his post of duty.

"You say you want to get out of the hoss business, hey?" inquired Roma Tibb from the side lines. He went on:

"I've always felt that there's a good living for a man with brains like you claim you've got, running a show with that moose. I'll swap."

"Being now discouraged and homeless, and having no special interest in life, I s'pose I might as well have a moose as any other critter," said the dejected Mr. Breed. "Never would have believed, if my own mother had so informed me, that I'd reach a stage of feelings where I'd swap a hoss for a moose—but it only goes to show how fur down a feller can be thrown in this world. Question is, how much boot be ye willing to pay?"

He went around the tree in order to lift up Blue Peter, who seemed to be taking it easy in a recumbent position.

"Get up and show this gent that you're worth twice as much as a moose," he commanded. Then he bent over his charger and yelped a horrified oath.

"My Gawd, he's dead!" he gasped. "She knocked him down, and he has been strangulated with his own hitch rein."

The bystanders promptly verified this post mortem.

At this moment Mr. Tink Capstick passed up the highway, casting only an indifferent side glance at the mourners who surrounded the deceased Blue Peter. Mr. Capstick was looking for bigger game than could be found among the nonentities of Shifters' Row. He wore striped trousers and a bobtailed coat, and had his hard hat tipped jauntily over one ear. He headed for the ticket window at the gate of the grounds. He pulled out his last coin—a half dollar.

"Never saw kale riveted to the rubes so hard as it is this year," pondered Mr.

Capstick. "Simply can't pry it loose. But if I don't slip a sliver off a Simple Simon in this hoof-heavers' bower, then I've got to go climb a tree and eat leaves."

But a sturdy man stopped him before he had spent that half dollar. The grim word "sheriff" was etched deeply into the man's gold badge.

"You can't go in there," said Sheriff Sproul.

"Why not?" But Mr. Capstick signally failed to muster indignation.

"If you really don't know, I'll tell you," said the sheriff. "But you might as well save my time and yours."

"Look-a-here, I ain't a dip."

The sheriff snapped a broad hand against Mr. Capstick's side pocket, then dove hand into that pocket and brought out a handful of gold watches.

"You come along with me. We'll see whether or not you're a pickpocket when folks begin to identify these watches."

"But you're off—'way off!" wailed Mr. Capstick. "Look at 'em! Open 'em! They're only gilt for my get-away game, man. Cost ten cents each. Only run ten minutes and tarnish if only exposed to an unkind thought. I'm doing an honest business, sheriff—truly." He grabbed away one of the watches, laid it on his palm, and banged his fist on it. Its case crumpled like pasteboard and its works spilled out. It was hardly more than an imitation watch. "Do you think I'd jounce jaspers for that kind of junk?" demanded Mr. Capstick. "Of course you know better, being a wise man, sheriff. Go through me. That's all the kind of timmy-dunk I've got on me. My game is all honest."

"It ain't honest enough to brag about if you go round selling that kind of jewelry."

"I don't sell it," protested Mr. Capstick, anxious to prove that he was not a pickpocket, for this sturdy man seemed to be determined to carry him along to

the jug on general principles. "I simply use it to help me in hunting out the natural-born crooks and making 'em divide with me."

The sheriff stared at him.

"It's this way," stated the prisoner. "I spot my come-on, let him see me pick up a watch, and tell him I'm a stranger just called home by my mother dying, and can't wait to advertise and find the owner, and wish I could find some honest man who'd do it, because then he would receive the reward. So he slips me something and takes the watch, and says he'll advertise. Doesn't intend to advertise—thinks he's getting a watch cheap. He——"

"Say, you put one foot ahead of the other and repeat the process till you're safe away from here," said the sheriff.

Mr. Capstick knew authority when he heard it voiced, and marched off, retracing his steps. This time he did not disdain the possibilities of Shifters' Row.

"If you can't get peaches, take prunes," he soliloquized.

He took a furtive glance over his shoulder, ducked off the highway, and went into a retired section of the birch grove to get his bearings. He found a bull moose sprawled upon his side, his head propped on the huge horns and his mouth wide open. A small boy stood gazing at the creature.

"I didn't do it," said the boy. "'Twuz another kid. He give him something that made him sick. I don't know what to do for a moose what's sick, do you, mister? Something ought to be done for him pretty quick."

"Yes, that's right," assented Mr. Capstick. "He ought to be buried. He's dead. Look here! What did that kid give this moose?"

"He wanted to see whuther he'd swaller a baseball—and he must have been hungry, 'cause he gulped it in. Will that moose kick me if I feel of him?"



"But you're off—way off!" wailed Mr. Capstick. "Look at 'em! Open 'em!"

"He ain't got a kick left in him—resembling me," stated Mr. Capstick.

The boy felt of the animal's neck very gingerly.

"He hadn't oughter tried to swallow it, mister. Here is that baseball—right in the neck."

"Everybody's getting it!" hummed Mr. Capstick, continuing on his way. He came upon the group which still surrounded Blue Peter.

"Everybody's getting it—getting it in the neck!" on hummed Mr. Capstick, noting the hitch rein that had choked off the horse's thin thread of life. "If this is the Mourners' Union, out tending to business," he remarked, "there's a second call for you over yonder. I just came past a dead moose."

Mr. Tibb tore away, and several men chased after him.

Mr. Capstick took advantage of the bustle his news had caused.

He uttered a cry, stooped suddenly, and picked up a watch.

"Gee!" he declared. "Some one of you chaps certainly has nursed a nug-

get for a watch. Come across with description and I'll kick in."

"Gold, is it?" inquired a man.

"Sure, a regular wealthy one."

"That lets us all out."

"But somebody will be hustling around here, offering a big reward. I'm leaving town next train—great hurry."

"That's lucky—you can get away with it before they catch you," said one of the horsemen, displaying only scant interest.

"But I don't want to get away with it. I want to leave it with an honest man. He can have the reward. No owner would take back this magnificent watch from the hand of that honest man and leave less than twenty-five dollars there. I'll sell out all chances for ten dollars."

He held the watch up and twirled it by the chain in the sunshine.

"What say?" he asked. Nobody said anything.

"Well, of course, any man with any claim to manhood will hand me here and now five dollars out of that reward

he's going to get," declared Mr. Capstick, exhibiting much astonishment.

"Guess you've brought your pigs to the wrong market, mister," said a languid bystander, after a rather prolonged silence. "I know this crowd, having swapped hosses with 'em for some years, and any man who's lucky enough to have a dollar in his pocket ain't gambling it on the future."

"Well, perhaps the owner will never show up," suggested Mr. Capstick.

"More likely will come around with a club and make the man who has that watch hire a lawyer to prove him innocent of picking a pocket to get it. Let well enough alone, and don't go to poking sleeping lions. That's a good motto."

The other men who loitered about did not appear interested enough in the matter to spend any conversation on it.

Mr. Capstick swore and went apart and sat down.

"I've forgot what kind of a bird it was that come along with a hand-out for old Elijah," he said to himself. "And I've forgot just what pull Elijah had. I wish I was more of a bird tamer."

He sat with his head in his hands and pondered. He was a statue of despondency. Like attracts like. The lugubrious Mr. Breed came and sat down beside him, and then there crawled that way the disconsolate Mr. Tibb. Lastly came Mr. Trask. He pointed to his jackass, who stood tethered, with hanging head and drooping ears.

"Why didn't you bring your friend over?" asked Mr. Capstick. "He looks sorry enough to fit into this party."

"He ain't no kind of an addition to any party, the way he is now," declared Mr. Trask. "He knowed eleven words of the human English language, besides some I couldn't just make out that might have been French—and the whole of 'em was scared out of him to-day by that cussed old moose with a balloon nose and a clothes hoss on his head."

"There ain't nothing to be gained by slurring the dead and gone," remonstrated Mr. Tibb. "When the animiles was planned out for the Garden of Eden, the moose took what was coming to him in the way of looks, and has done the best he could ever since. Now he's gone and I hain't got anything left to make a living with. And I'd just thought of a scheme—I was going to train him to a sulky and have him trot an exhibition heat."

"I could have sold you my gig. I hain't got any use for it," said Mr. Breed.

Then silence fell on the little group, and continued for a long time.

"Gents," said Mr. Capstick, who had been meditating long and earnestly, "why does the cat have nine lives? It's because she always lands on her feet when she is thrown down hard. I am a quick thinker, which same has to be done quick in my line of business, nature of which business I will not bother to explain just now. But I have studied the world and have watched great operations, wishing that capital would pick me up and use my talents. What do business men do when they can't swing a matter by their lonesome? They combine. They organize a syndicate. It's the trend of modern business. Here we are, sitting here; each has been trimmed of something—can't go on and operate alone. Jackass has lost power to converse and needs new attraction, this man has lost his hoss, that man has lost his moose. I have lost considerable faith in human nature, and need to be spurred up. But banded together, and using such resources as are left to us, we might rise from the ashes, so to speak. I'll invest my brains."

The bereaved Mr. Tibb scowled at this suggestion.

"I've only got a dead moose to invest. But it's tangible property, and it's in full sight—there's that much to say. I want to say further that nothing can

be worked out of me by a con game—there's nothing in me to be worked out."

"You don't think I've got a pane of glass set into the top of my head, do you?" demanded Mr. Capstick. "But I'll show you what brains can do. I see you've got a tent there," he remarked to Mr. Trask. "Let's set it up. It's all right to hold a Sunday-school picnic outdoors, but a modern syndicate needs privacy."

"I think we ought to be told full plans here and now before starting anything," objected Mr. Trask.

"Let me alone whilst I'm thinking, and go ahead and pitch that tent," commanded the brains investor tartly. "Don't you down-and-outers presume to talk back to me when I'm devoting my time and talents to getting an air cushion under you before you go bump for your finish."

"I might as well go on ahead, even if I don't see just where it's leading to," stated Mr. Breed somberly. "There ain't nothing left for me to go back to."

After a few moments devoted to meditation, the other members of the syndicate seemed to agree with him. They proceeded to set up the tent, and Mr. Capstick pondered with his head in his hands.

"Gents, it's this way," he announced, when they were assembled within the tent and the flap had been carefully drawn. "In this general reorganization, we've got to use such assets as are left to us. I will now jot down same." He proceeded, using a stubby lead pencil and the back of a handbill. "Harness and gig, one jackass, tent, one dead moose."

"My dead hoss is just as much of an asset as that dead moose," insisted Mr. Breed.

"Not so, my friend," retorted Mr. Capstick. "Showing where my brains make me a better man in this emergency than you are."

Mr. Breed pulled out a huge knife of

the toad-stabber variety and gloomily whittled off a chew of tobacco.

"But that knife is an asset. Is it sharp?"

"Middling."

"Get a rein from that harness, and proceed to put an extra edge on your knife. Now, gents, I'm ready to come to cases with you. Any man can make money by stirring the interest and curiosity of the world. I refer to Barnum and let the matter drop, having no need to argue the question. Nature has done much in the animal kingdom, but the world has been searched from pole to pole, and nature no longer has new marvels to offer. Therefore, we must improve upon nature."

"We will rip the skin and horns off the head of that moose, give the skin a good scraping inside and a once over with some juice steeped out of the hemlock bark we'll get in these woods near by, build the head out with some sticks, leave the shoulder skin and mane to drape, and we'll stick the thing onto the head of this jackass and have the eighth wonder of the world. Show now going on, ladies and gents. View the wonders of the universe, the marvelous beast captured by our special band of intrepid explorers in the wild wastes of the new-found continent at the south pole. One price admits to all. Come in and gaze, discuss, and admire—and so on and so on."

"I merely desire to show you gents that I know how to bark in front of an attraction. You're lucky to get hold of me. And as soon as we get that jackass nicely used to that head, we'll hitch him into that gig and do exhibition quarters between heats. We can pull down good money from every fair association in this State." He tapped his knuckles against the side of his head. "Brains, gents, brains!" he declared.

But Mr. Trask displayed no enthusiasm. He glowered at Mr. Capstick.

"Is that the best you can do in the



"Look here! Do I understand that you gents are combining again't the brains of the outfit? Are you trying to throw down the manager?"

way of appreciation when an inspired plan is put up to you?" demanded the promoter.

"You can't expect me to rise and sing hallelujah over any such idea as that. Moose scared Demosthenes once so that he forgot to talk; next time he'll be so scared he'll forget to eat."

"In the case of human beings a second shock often brings 'em back to normal," declared Mr. Capstick. "He'll probably begin to express himself again when we put that head onto him. If I was a jackass, I most certainly would. Now don't be a fool, my friend. Your critter won't be hurt, and all the rest of us will be helped."

After argument and after viewing the subject in all lights, and counting the few coins he had left, and failing to get as much as a monosyllable out of Demosthenes, Mr. Trask gave in. He blamed Demosthenes for this decision.

"Dum blast ye!" he yelled at the cowering recalcitrant. "You could have

been a gent and taken your ease if you'd only kept your head. Now go to work and earn your oats the best way you can."

The activities of the four members of the syndicate were spurred from that time on by hunger and by the knowledge that there was only one more day of the Gents' Driving Association meet. By midnight they had made great progress. In fact, they had so nearly finished their work that they were discussing the name this eighth wonder of the universe should bear.

"He answers well to the name of Demosthenes," ventured Mr. Trask. "I've always been kind of proud of getting hold of that name."

"Answers!" sneered Mr. Capstick. "I haven't heard him answer you anything yet. And that would be a rip of a name to bark with, now wouldn't it?"

"The Mysterious Unknown' always seemed to me to be a good name to coax 'em in with," suggested Mr. Breed,

scraping industriously on the inside of the skin.

"Say, look here! The feller that bought a line of side-show animals off'n Noah, when the ark landed, used that name for a freak, and it's been used ever since," scoffed Mr. Capstick, stirring the hemlock brew over Mr. Trask's oil stove. "It's lucky you fellers have got a man with brains at the head of the syndicate."

"There ain't nobody nominated you to be at the head of it," objected Mr. Trask. "I've got the most invested."

"Well, it has been *invested*—and I'm running this thing," stated Mr. Capstick. "I can either make it go, and go big, or I can bust it. So shut up. And the name of this completed marvel of nature will be 'the moojack.' Get me? *There's* a good mouthful for a barker. Right this way for the sole and only moojack! See how you can come out hard on that name, hey? Try it over on your voice, gents! The moo-o-o-jack!"

Mr. Capstick, enthusiastic over his choice of nomenclature, evidently forgot that it was past the midnight hour, and bellowed with zest.

"Are the real property owners in this enterprise going to have anything at all to say about it?" asked Mr. Tibb. His own sense of values had begun to blaze up a bit. The head of the defunct moose, with its noble reach of antlers, looked better as it took form under manipulation. "I'm investing something besides wind and hoorah in this proposition. A moose's head ain't found kicking around the bushes every day. I've known of a hundred dollars being paid for a good head."

"That would show a lot of business ability, wouldn't it? To sell this to be stuck upon a wall when it can be used in a brainy and intelligent manner as an investment, calling in the masses, so that we can smile and listen to the

merry jingle of the coins!" Mr. Capstick's tone was raspy with disgust.

"Yes, and speaking of coin jingling, I'd like to ask in just whose fist that coin is going to jingle," inquired Mr. Breed, feeling that he belonged a bit more intimately in the affairs of the syndicate. "I've suffered the worst loss, having a spirited and vallyble hoss pass away—a hoss that represented the full value of a hay press and tackle and two work hosses. Under the circumstances, I've got to look out for myself pretty sharp. And I'll state that, having had recent sad experiences, I don't take much stock in human honesty."

"There ain't any need of more than one of us standing out in front of this tent. There's only a limited number in the syndicate, and we've got to make members go as far as they can in operations," said Mr. Capstick. "I have just been showing you that I'm the only one that's fully qualified to do the barking—having the natural flow of language and the inborn eloquence. If any other man here thinks he can outtalk me, let him try it."

"We ain't trying to take away any of your honors as a gabber," acknowledged Mr. Trask. "We ain't got any ambitions in that line."

"The man who barks can sell tickets as he talks—that's the best way of attracting money. The crowd is right handy to the man who is barking. Why waste two men outside on one man's job? And we need a man to take tickets at the door."

"But you're figuring to have the coin jingle in your own hand," insisted Mr. Breed. "I may be too suspicious—but I've been done by my fellow human beings too much to have faith in 'em."

"There's got to be a man inside the tent to keep the crowding and enthusiastic populace away from the fiery moojack," declared Mr. Capstick. "It ain't going to do to let the people get too close. The moojack is going to look bet-

ter when viewed from a respectful distance."

"Well, there's still one more of us. What's the job for him?" asked Mr. Trask.

"I—I think," said Mr. Capstick, after exhibiting a bit of confusion, "that two men are going to be needed to keep the populace away from the moojack. This is going to be a brand-new animal, and we can't take too many precautions."

"Last remark is well said, and is carefully noted," stated Mr. Trask.

Mr. Capstick shook in the air the wooden paddle with which he had been stirring the brew of the hemlock bark.

"Look here! Do I understand that you gents are combining against the brains of this outfit? Are you trying to throw down the manager?"

"There's none of us three here that's chewing on a teething ring, and we don't need no manager," affirmed Mr. Breed.

It was plainly and manifestly a split, three to one—and a natural split. They were three elderly countrymen with the sullen obstinacy of dull natures and the ever-ready suspicion that flames in rural breasts at sight of a cocky young chap from the city, with smart attire and fluent speech and dominating manners.

"You ain't been asked in to be a general guardeen for three men who are old enough to be your father," said Mr. Breed. "You're proposing to take our property and run it just as if it was your own. And we don't even know what your regular business is."

"It's been passed around that some pretty flip fly-by-nights is operating at this trotting meet," averred Mr. Tibb. "You can't be too careful in dealing with strangers. We've got property, and it's property that's right out in plain sight, and we'd better figger on taking mighty good care of it."

Mr. Capstick stared from one to the

other of these amazing and ungrateful rebels.

"What would this ten cents' worth of junk you call property have amounted to if it hadn't been for me, you tin-horn Hezekiahs?" he stormed. "I've used my brains and made it into capital. You were sitting there as useless as false teeth in a bulldog's baggage till I came along."

"And ever since you came along, you have talked so loud and so fast that we couldn't do any thinking for ourselves," stated Mr. Trask. "There's no telling how much better plan we might have thought up—just us three, being of the same age and knowing better what we want than some young city squirt knows."

"Them's my sentiments exact," agreed Mr. Tibb.

"Mine to a T," asserted Mr. Breed.

"Now it's a proper question to ask whuther you've got any visible property to invest in this projick," said Mr. Trask, acting as spokesman, after the other two had nodded to him.

"My investment is already in—my brains. I've made your property worth something," raved Mr. Capstick.

"Nothing goes with me but what is visible and on the table, where it's plain to be seen," affirmed Mr. Trask, "and my two friends, here, having put in visible property, agree with me. You may be pretty smart, you city fellers, but ye can't stripe fog hunks and sell 'em to us for candy."

"Are you going to quit—give up this scheme I've lined out?" squeaked the promoter.

"Oh, it ain't much of an idee," said Mr. Trask indifferently, "but seeing that me and my two friends have gone so far as we have in it, we shall probably keep right on. It may do till we think up something better."

Mr. Capstick threw his paddle at Trask's head, but the latter ducked effectively.

"By the bald-headed Nicodemus, if I haven't gone and let myself be scalloped by three fodder wallopers right in the high grass itself!" he yelled. "Done good and plenty, and still there are dips who think all the jaspers carry self-dumping wallets! It's a cinch that yaps with the wildwoods on their chins can come up to the big lane and do the squeeze gang out of their last kopeck. Look here, you three old coots, you don't dare to do this! You don't dare to fork me for my lay! I can slice you open on the deal, wider than split cod-fish."

"Ain't afraid of ye nor of an army just like ye. You're all mouth and bluster. We don't need ye, any way, shape, nor manner. We can go right ahead and make a moojack better'n you can."

"Don't you dare to use that name. I reserve it. It's copyrighted."

"Probably shall think of a better one later, when we've put our minds to it. Just now shall call it a moojack, and how ye going to help yourself?"

When Mr. Capstick attempted to stutter his ideas as to how he might help himself, there arose three grim elderly men, and they tossed him out of the tent.

"I'll get even with you for this," came the rabid threat from the outer darkness. "I'll get even, if I have to catch hydrophobia and bite you."

The three resumed work, after they were sure that Mr. Capstick had departed.

"It's queer how tricky them city chaps

always are—trying to sneak in and do you," observed Mr. Tibb, picking up the paddle and continuing Mr. Capstick's self-appointed task.

"Produce property if you're going into pardnership; that's what I say," said Mr. Breed. "If you can't show something tangible, then get out. He wanted to take something from us without giving anything back. That's city style and manners. I'm glad I've got plain country honesty. We three can get along all right together."

And having thus clarified their partnership into such a condition of righteousness, they placidly continued their work of constructing the moojack.

"Ain't that city for you?" commented Mr. Trask, after a time. "They always want to handle all the money. I'm glad we three thought up this way of pooling our property. I reckon we're going to do real well with it, now that we've got rid of the one disturbing element."

And thus in much greater ventures have the inventor's brains been scorned and cast into outer darkness when the strangle hold of property has secured control of the fruits of his dreams.

This tale properly ends here, its moral having been expounded. But it must occur to the thoughtful reader that a moojack, having been created, must necessarily stir another train of events. The moojack did, and the tale will be related in the next number of SMITH'S.





War-Time Views

By Hildegard Lavender

Author of "Managing Mothers and Others," "Doing Good," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY LAURA E. FOSTER

THE scene upon which the doctor and he: black bag descended late in the autumn afternoon was one of extreme and feverish activity. The hostess, in her wing chair behind the tea table, was pouring tea with one hand, while the other took nervous stitches in a piece of gray linen which she was ornately decorating for its humble mission of covering an asbestos iron holder. The bride, very pink as to cheeks and very bright as to eyes, was knitting a great mass of blue and white into some sort of a jacket. The grandmother was doing something mysterious to old pieces of damask. All were talking as excitedly and as continuously as the rules of an elastic courtesy permitted.

"Strong, doctor dear?" inquired the hostess, abandoning for the moment her iron holder and peering into the depths of her Staffordshire teapot.

"If you please," said the doctor. She surveyed the group somewhat sardonically. "I infer that I see something in progress for the Red Cross or the Prince of Wales or the Belgian or the German Relief Fund?"

"For the Red Cross bazaar," explained the bride, searching her knitting bag for a ball of white wool. "Next Friday and Saturday, you know, at the Field Club. I have the fancywork ta-

ble, and the girls are helping me. What will you do, doctor dear?"

"Nothing," replied the doctor morosely, stirring and sampling her tea with an expression of great hostility toward every form of good works.

At first they stared at her unbelievably. Then they decided to take it as one of the doctor's grim jokes. They laughed, albeit a little uncertainly and feebly. But the grandmother looked sharply at the doctor. She detected something more than mere whim and jocularity in the response.

"Don't you believe in the Red Cross work?" she asked mildly.

"What a question, grandmother dear!" exclaimed the hostess. "Of course even our rebellious doctor, who always wants to swim against the stream, must believe in the Red Cross! Why, it's her own profession at work in time of war and calamity—that's what it is. For all her perversity, she's a humane creature. Of course she believes in the Red Cross."

But the grandmother continued to await the doctor's own version of her opinion. That exasperating female poured herself another cup of tea, took a cake carefully from the cake basket, and tested its sweetness before she began to elucidate her views.

"Thank you, dear Madam Hostess,"



she said finally, "for including me among the humane. But if a belief in forwarding the work of the Red Cross Society at this particular moment of the world's ugly history is the measure of a humane woman, then you may count me out. I'm not one." And she continued to munch her cake with relish.

"What cranky notion have you in your head now?" demanded the mother of five from the table by the window, where she was water-coloring dinner cards at the rate of a machine, but with considerable charm, nevertheless. The mother of five had had aspirations toward another career than that of the nursery once upon a time, and she always rejoiced in an opportunity to take out her brushes on a pretext that seemed to her to justify their reappearance in her hands. "Do you like the thought of suffering—such terrible, horrible, unbelievable suffering? Do you like to think of men mangled and bleeding and dying in torment? What on earth is the matter with you, anyway?"

"We were caught in France," said the bride. "If you had seen the poor women in the little village where we were staying when the mobilization call came and their men went off to the war! If you could have seen them, with their horribly patient eyes! I shall never get rid of the thought of their eyes—"

"Do you think you are going to put brightness in the peasant women's eyes by helping the makers of wars to foot the ghastly bills?" demanded the doctor tartly.

The bride gasped. "Why, what do you mean?" she exclaimed.

"What do I mean? It's very simple!" cried the doctor, with a sort of fury. But she was not allowed to go on as easily as that. The whole room was speaking.

"Of course, there has been a lot of criticism of the Red Cross manage-

ment," said some one. "But this is a time to sink criticism. And even if it does take such a large proportion of its income to pay just its running expenses, why, that's inevitable—"

"Of course," admitted another, "the social climbers are using it for all they're worth in the big cities, but out here in this democratic suburb that's nothing—"

"Whenever I think of Louvain—it was where Harry and I were engaged, nine years ago—I feel that I can't do enough for the Belgians."

"For Heaven's sake!" cried the exasperated doctor again. "What are you all talking about? I haven't suggested a criticism of the Red Cross management, have I? I dare say it's managed as well and as economically as any human institution that is cursed with the taint of sentimentality can be managed. Of course, no one expects it to be managed as well as the Standard Oil or the United States Steel Corporation—they haven't begun to apply very severe efficiency tests to the organization of philanthropies and charities yet! And I don't care how many women in New York or Boston or Chicago or Philadelphia get their names on a committee with Mrs. Vanderbilt or Mrs. Cabot or Mrs. Field or Mrs. Biddle by way of the Red Cross; or how many women who have never penetrated into a first-class drawing-room before in their lives become familiar with the most expensive ones in all the cities of the Union."

"Then why—" began the mother of five, turning away from the table in the corner, as the light failed her entirely.

"Why am I opposed to the Red Cross work of relief? I'll tell you, if you'll all listen and not interrupt me with irrelevancies about the debt we owe to the country that produced Schubert or Lafayette or Shakespeare! And if you will carefully note the fact that I am not opposed to the work of the Red

Cross, in any natural disaster—in any disaster that was not courted, wooed, invited, by men themselves! But—I'm trying to be logical."

"Logical! And you a doctor—a practitioner of the art of healing!" murmured some one.

"Even so." The doctor promptly accepted the implied rebuke to her inconsistency. "And you may remember that many a practitioner of the art of healing does cruel-seeming work with knives rather than gentle-seeming work with drugs, in the belief that only so can deep-seated maladies be dealt with. I confess that to watch all the women of the world busy making bandages and nightshirts, busy raising money for ether and nurses, in this most horrible time, gives me much the same feeling that it would give me to see a doctor attacking an ulcer with a pretty bottle of lavender water. There is"—her eyes glowed a trifle fanatically—"one power in the world that can end war—that power is the united will of the women of the world. When you realize that, doesn't it make you rather scornful of these alleviative things you are all doing?"

"The united will of the women of the world?" queried the grandmother.

"Yes'm. Don't you believe me? Don't you believe me?" She swung her burning glance around to the mother of five. Then it strayed to the hostess, whose iron holder had fallen temporarily into her lap. "Don't you? You've borne two children—don't you all know that life is sacred to women, that they are the conservers of it, that the long period of their close communion with the child gives them a reverence for life that is the very main-spring of their natures? I know it! I have learned it in helping many women through the agony of childbearing, in watching them come up from the dark waters with only one thought in their minds after their journey to the edge

of the other world, and that thought of the life they had just given the world!

"Every one of us, consciously or unconsciously, actively or potentially, possesses that deep-rooted reverence for life. All the women of the race since Eve have bequeathed it to us. Good, bad, indifferent—we have it; it isn't a virtue any more than it is a virtue in us to breathe. The female of the other species than ours have a fierce protective instinct toward the life that they produce. I needn't cite the lioness and her cubs. The female of our species has the protective instinct not only toward the life she has given the world, but toward all life. It's only the abnormal woman who can commit murder; it's only the abnormal woman who refuses life its chance of being, by deliberately refusing motherhood. It's because women are the conservers of life that it's easy for the men to get them busy raising funds for ether and surgeons and lint and hospital ships and all that rose-water stuff!"

"But if women care so for life, how can they do anything else in time of war? How can they sit with idle hands while men are suffering and dying?" demanded the bride indignantly.

"Ah, in time of war! Yes, when they have let the war come, then there isn't much to do but to let it run its course," agreed the doctor sadly.

"When *they* have let it come!" exclaimed the grandmother. "Come, come, doctor dear! You aren't trying to imply that the unfortunate women of those wretched countries over there could have prevented the war! You don't think they were consulted about Austria's note to Serbia, or about Germany's backing up of her ally, or about England's swift decision to punish the invasion of Belgium! You don't think the women were consulted—you don't believe all those old '*cherchez-la-femme*' notions, all those '*petticoat-behind-the-throne*' legends, do you?"



"If you had seen the poor women in the little village where we were staying when the mobilization call came, and their men went off to the war!"

"Indeed I do not," replied the doctor swiftly. "I don't believe one of them. I'm quite sure that the women were not consulted. That is, of course, what I am arriving at—they were not consulted. Why not? Because they occupy an entirely negligible position in the world. They have no voice in the government. That is exactly what I am objecting to! You all—we all—they all—all the women in the world are occupying themselves with wretched, makeshift, palliative measures. They are trying—those pitiful, poor souls of the man-denuded countries overseas—to harvest the crops, to keep the stores, to tend the stock—if any stock is left to them—to teach the children—to carry on the whole work of civilization without a particle of aid from the able-bodied men of their nations. The young boys, the weaklings, and the old, decrepit men remain to aid them—no one else! We, over here—of course our hearts ache and bleed for them! Of course we are busy with all manner of pitifully futile things to help them—with cake sales and dinner cards and sewing circles! But why aren't we all—all the women in the world—united for one great and real object—united to make our voices heard effectively before the wars begin?"

"I think," observed the grandmother mildly, yet with a light of approval in her eyes, "that our dear doctor is giving us a suffrage talk in disguise."

"It's not so awfully well disguised," observed the mother of five, who was an anti. But she spoke without vindictiveness.

"Of course I'm giving you a suffrage talk. And you probably object, some of you, that my suffrage talk is untimely. You say it ought to be deferred until people are at leisure to hear about abstractions—that what they need now is help for a condition that confronts them, not talk about a theory that, in operation, might have prevented

that condition! But this is the time to talk theories. In time of war, prepare for peace! It's the only time in which to prepare for it; in peace, no one is willing to listen to alarmists, no one will believe that horror is lurking around the corner. This is the time to prepare for peace—and that is why I'm talking this way now.

"If all those poor, poor souls over there will only see now, without the glamour of peace and happiness, now, while their eyes are facing the world as men and monarchies decree it to be—if they will only see now that they must never again be caught unprepared, must never again be the ciphers in the nation's life that they have been on this occasion, when all the black and gray and yellow eagles flapped their wings and screamed for war—why, then, a start has been made. If all of us, here, instead of merely being wrung with shudders of pity at the thought of those pleasant fields where we have taken our holidays being a shambles, instead of merely making shirts and bandages for hospitals—and thereby, by the way, doing the sewing women out of wages!—instead of being merely sentiment and lavender water in our view of the situation—if, instead, we will declare that our opinions shall henceforth count, that sacred zeal for life shall be duly expressed in the action of our own nation—because we have the right to voice that zeal—then a start has been made. And now is the time to make it—now, while we are all seeing, every day, with eyes sharpened by horror, what a nightmare a world may be in which women have no real voice!"

They looked at her, glowing and lit by the fervor of her ideas, with a new interest.

"Of course," she went on, unmindful of their scrutiny, "if we were logical and united—we women—we wouldn't make a bandage or raise a dollar for their hospital transports. We

would say to them: 'You have decided on war—without asking our opinion. All right—go ahead and see how you like it! We will do nothing to make it easy for you. We won't harvest the crops, we won't keep the stores, we won't nurse the sick and the wounded. We will raise no money for you.

" 'You have been preparing for war for years—ten, twenty, forty! You have found money for dreadnaughts and superdreadnaughts, for cruisers and airships and machine guns. You have strutted before one another, daring one another! You have built up big armies. You have taxed your people cruelly to support these military shows and threats in one another's eyes. Why, in the name of common sense, did you not set aside enough out of each year's army-and-navy budget to provide for your lint and your ether and your nurses and your surgeons? You courted war—you made it inevitable, with your mighty armaments. But apparently you counted upon none of the expenses of the war that you made so inevitable! When it came upon you—invited by you, rendered certain and sure by you—you immediately needed the help of all the world to make the ineffective little poultices, apply the futile little salves. Why wasn't part of each year's army-and-navy budget as automatically set aside for war-relief work as for turbines and bullets?

" 'You want us, who have had no part in bringing about the war, to supply the liniment, so to speak, for war's wounds. Well, we won't do it! We have been out of it from the beginning—we'll keep out of it at the end.' Yes," ruminated the doctor softly, "if the women of the world only had the logic to speak like that, to speak with one voice, something might be done! If they only had the magnificent logic to refuse to bear more material for the field guns to mow down—if they only

had the iron wills to refuse to bear children until universal disarmament had begun——"

"That is an unnatural and impious thought, doctor," reproved the grandmother. But the doctor's eyes flashed.

"Is it?" she asked. "Do you consider that it is quite so blasphemous as the thought of the world rulers who say to women: 'Bear us sons for slaughter!' I confess that to me it would seem less unnatural. However, we are all human beings, and absolute logic and foresight are unlikely to rule our actions. If only comparative logic, only comparative caution, sway us for the future, I shall be satisfied. If only every one of us resolves to do her personal best to have a voice—which means a vote!—when the question of the size of the armament of her nation comes up, I shall try to be satisfied."

"You speak as if armaments were the cause of war," objected the mother of five.

"I admit that I do. I think they are the cause of the war in the same sense that the loaded revolver in the house, or the convenient stiletto in the pocket, is the cause of murder, when family rage runs high among the uncivilized, or when jealousy creeps after its victim through the slums. Of course, if the family all had sweet and equable tempers, if no one in the house ever 'saw red,' then loaded revolvers might be used for household adornments without fear of fatal consequences. It's the conjunction of evil human passions with the weapon that causes the tragedy. It seems a little easier, or, at any rate, a little more immediately effective, for us to restrict the use of firearms than to undertake the swift spiritual regeneration of the world.

"Even the law recognizes the true psychology of that conjunction of the weapon with the moment of anger; it doesn't insist upon a man's loving his neighbor as himself—though doubtless

that is a desideratum—but it does insist that he shall not carry a weapon without a license! I think the rule would work equally well with nations. It would be highly desirable if they would rid themselves of jealousies and greeds, of the habit of coveting one another's colonies, and making eyes at one another's trade; it would be highly desirable if they would all engrave the Golden Rule in their hearts and under their coats of arms.

"But, meantime, it would certainly 'help some' if there really were a congress of nations, and if it decreed a

universal disarmament. It's surprising how far reason and conciliatory politeness will go when there is no weapon in the disputants' hands."

"And meantime, doctor dear, the world being what it is and where it is, and universal disarmament and universal women's suffrage being still in the future——" began the hostess, producing a Red Cross collector's notebook, "how much will you give to the fund?"

And the doctor, with a laugh and a sigh, took the little volume and wrote down her name, with something in two figures beside it.

Late Winter

COMES a little time of slumber
 'Twixt the snow and radiant spring,
 When a while the world wears umber—
 Sober hues in everything.
 Rends the dazzling drift and shows
 Dull-brown clay—would one suppose
 It could ever hide a *rose*?

All this grass is bleached and faded;
 Such a paltry seed spray stirred
 It could scarce have plumped, unaided,
 To his fluffy size this bird
 Picking it with eager bill,
 While his smoke-blue feather frill
 Ruffs his neck when winds are chill.

Skies are sometimes bright, these noons,
 But their blue is veiled with haze,
 And at eve the palest moons
 Swim above the cloudy ways.
 Yet this nature doze is good;
 Not in slothful, sullen mood
 Lies her spell on field and wood.

Hopes may grow in times of resting—
 Thrill and bud before they flower;
 Hearts must strengthen for the testing
 Of the great fulfillment hour.
 Love, our hearts may dream as glad
 As when these bare boughs are clad
 Like a bride, and robin mad!

JEANNIE PENDLETON EWING.



Just Letters

By Lucy Stone Terrill

Author of "Dear," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY MAYO BUNKER



*Sheridan, Wyoming.
Sunday Night, June 5.*

DEAR JOHN: Behold me seated on my trunk, desolate, staring at bare walls, while I wait for the cabman. The only thing that isn't packed is this little stub pencil, and I'm trying to inject courage enough into it to tell you that I'm not coming home, after all—until next October.

I leave in one hour on a freight train, so I haven't much time to tell you about it, and you'll have to gather details between the lines.

I'm going to teach a summer school. John, I simply have to do it, for I owe every one in this town except my wash-lady and the postmaster. And my self-respect does rebel at borrowing money to buy my wedding dress. I'm so ashamed to think I didn't save any money all year, and, oh, how I've prayed lately for something to happen! Prayer's a great thing. Try it, John. Thus was I rewarded:

This afternoon I got a long-distance call.

"Is this here Miss Lane?" asked a great, big voice.

"It is," said I. "I suppose you're that eternal book agent?"

"Nope. I'm Jim Bright—president o' the Cottonwood school board. They've got to have a teacher over there this summer, and the superintendent said you'd fill the bill. The young ones are pretty on'ry; they run the last teacher clean out o' the hills. But there's only two a-goin' to school now. Can you come?"

"What is the salary?" I asked coolly, though I would have accepted with gratitude if only for my board and room.

"Sixty dollars is all we can pay to learn two young ones; but you can get board cheap!"

"Sixty dollars—sixty dollars—sixty dollars!" The words hopped around in my head like crickets, but I managed to say in my professional tone: "That is satisfactory. When am I to come?"

"Better go out to-night on the two o'clock freight. Freights is all that stops at Cottonwood. You better bring a broom and a speller or two and a little chalk. We don't want to spend any more'n we haf to. Anything you'd like to ask about?"

"Why, yes. Where am I to stay?"

"Oh, you can stop to-night with the agent's wife. You'll find a place to

stay, all right. The parents o' the scholars ain't ever friendly enough with the teacher to board her, but there's lots o' dry farmers scattered around in the hills."

"You couldn't board me, then?" I asked.

"Lord, no! I ain't no dry farmer. My ranch is thirty miles from Cottonwood. You can write to me when your first month is up and I'll send you your money. I reckon that's all. Good-by!"

So that's all I know about it. I'd have liked to ask some more questions, but he didn't seem desirous of having me. I hear the cab coming now. So good-by quickly.

RUTH.

Cottonwood, Wyoming.

June 6.

DEAR OLD JOHN: I'm here. It's raining pitchforks. Through a tiny little window, I can see a two-dollar bunch of daisies off my hat that isn't paid for dangling to and fro on the barbed-wire fence, and right outside the door is a little yellow pool that used to be chalk.

Mrs. Barnes—my landlady—has departed to inform the parent of my children that I have arrived. It seems that no one around here knew that there was to be any summer school. Mrs. Barnes said:

"That Bright ought to be hung!" And I agree with her. I should want to be chief rooster at the obsequies. Well, prepare yourself for a young book.

It was three-thirty when the conductor deposited me on the Cottonwood car tracks, accompanied by my two suit cases, a broom, a box of chalk, and a small bump of lonesomeness away inside of me. I think I stood perfectly still for about ten minutes, watching the light on the end of the train waver out of sight. I was never in such utter darkness in my

life, and I might have descended into the tombs of Egypt. There wasn't a sound.

A faint whistle came back through the blackness, and it sounded to me like the good-by from everything in the whole world, but I felt around for my bundles and started down the track. Right there was another opportunity you missed, John. If you had presented yourself then, I'd have married you on the spot and worshiped you for the rest of my life. However, you weren't there, and, to add to my cheerfulness, big drops of rain began to spatter down. So I aimed at a sleepy-looking ray of light that shone out of nowhere, and followed it to what proved to be the depot. After some difficulty, I located a doorknob, and walked in.

If he hadn't looked so undesirous of it, I should have embraced the astonished individual who sat with his feet perched up on a rusty stove and the middle of his back planted in the bottom of a chair.

"Well, where the devil did you come from?" was his hospitable greeting.

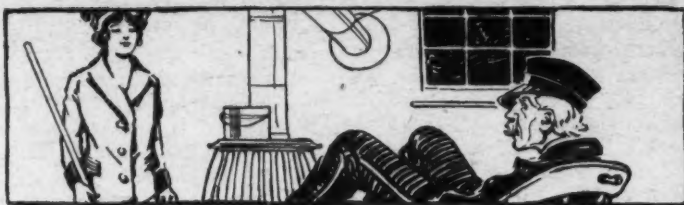
So, while he was climbing both down and up into his chair, I began telling him my reasons for being there, and asked if his wife could keep me for the rest of the night.

"Haven't got any wife," he informed me. "Never did have. Isn't any women round here 'tall. Fool thing, sending a civilized woman to a hole like this!"

After some further remarks on his opinion of liars and school boards, he grudgingly offered his escort to the homestead house of a woman, who, he said, "lives alone with a hell of a temper, and shoots at any one who bothers her."

With this happy bit of information, we started on our quest. Do you remember the time you taught me to play





"Follow Your Leader," and made me jump out of the barn loft and nearly break my neck? I wish you could have been with us last night, in the rain and pitch dark, over car-tracks, through barbed-wire fences, stumbling alternately over an unwieldy broom and wet clumps of sagebrush. I tell you, the fond anticipation of that sixty dollars left me entirely. We didn't carry on much of a conversation, because we were both so occupied with our feet, but after a time I ventured pleasantly:

"Will you please tell me before we come to any more wire fences? I nearly wrecked that last one."

"Yes. There ought to be one pretty close. I'm not sure just where I am. This is my first call on the old lady."

We were going down the steepest bank in Wyoming, and I was holding my breath and punching the darkness ahead with my broom in a vain effort to locate a fence, when all at once my protector broke into the sincerest profanity I have ever heard, which ended in a loud "Damn!" and a big splash. I thought he must have slid into a cloudburst, so I stuck the broom into the soft ground and tried to slow up a little bit.

"Where are you?" I called between splashes.

"I was in her spring—I'm out now. Your suit case is still in there. You'd better turn to your right."

I turned. He rescued my suit case, and we went on very silently. Finally we came to what seemed to be a good-sized dry-goods box, and he announced in rather a scared voice:

"This is the damned place!" and then

called loudly: "Mrs. Barnes! Oh, Mrs. Barnes!"

Nothing but an echoing silence. He tried again.

"Mrs. Barnes! Hello, Mrs. Barnes!"

This brought results. A piercing voice shot out at us, startling me so that, in my efforts to get to a safer range, I nearly upset the little man, who had got behind me.

"You better make tracks out of here! I've got my gun! I'll show you how to come molesting a lone woman!"

"Say something! Say something!" my companion kept repeating in a frenzied whisper, which evidently penetrated the walls of my future home, for our hostess shrieked with even greater conviction:

"You'd better say something—pretty quick, too!"

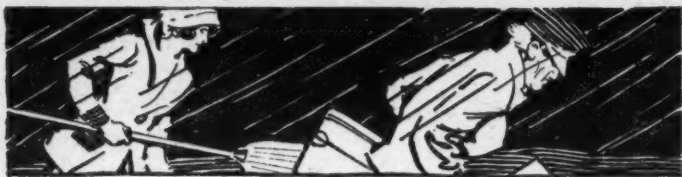
At this, Mr. Station Agent began to depart, and under such stern necessity my speech wandered back.

"Mrs. Barnes," I said weakly, "I'm the new school-teacher, and we came over to see if I can stay all night with you."

"Well, why on earth didn't you say so?" she asked in an entirely different voice, as she unlatched the door. "Come in! Who's that fool man with you?"

I explained matters to her while she helped me out of my wet clothes, and here I am.

The whole house isn't much larger than your fraternity pin, and, of course, it isn't plastered, but every crack is carefully covered with the smelliest of tar paper. There is a tiny stove in one corner, a bed in another, the table in



another, and a cupboard in another. Everything else except the rag carpet hangs around on the walls. When you want a place for anything, you pound in a nail.

Mrs. Barnes is delightful. She promises to be my most interesting landlady, and, as you know, I am an authority on landlady. She swears quite a little, has had three husbands, and seems awfully glad, in rather a brusque way, to have me with her.

Here she comes, now, so I'll hear about my pupils. I understand they're somewhat wild, and their father don't approve of teachers. Wait a few minutes and I'll tell you the news.

Well, she reports that the fond father says his children shan't come to school at all. He told her:

"If Bright thinks he can run this here destrict, let him furnish the young ones. My kids ain't a-goin'."

However, I am going to the schoolhouse in the morning. I *will* have that sixty dollars, even if I have to sit and chant the multiplication tables in solitude. With my sincere love,

RUTH.

P. S.—Don't worry. She's clean. Everything's spotless.

Same place.

Wednesday Night.

Oh, John, you dear old thing! I got your letters to-night — forwarded from Sheridan—and I hadn't had any idea you had planned so much on my coming home or

I think I would have tried to borrow the railroad fare from some one, and gone. I'm dreading to hear from you when you learn of this new home of mine; but please don't be *too* dismal about it. It's a trifle strenuous for me to "keep cheerful," as it is.

Yesterday was about the blue-devil-est day I've ever had. I left here at eight o'clock and walked the longest, wettest two miles in the United States, through the loneliest place in all the world, I know—just rain and gray sky and brown hills, and brown hills and gray sky and rain and me, that was all.

Finally I came to my schoolhouse. A piano box is spacious in comparison. The foundation consists of four flat rocks, one at each corner. There are but six bricks left in the chimney, and every windowpane is broken. I made a dignified entry through one of the windows, because the door wouldn't open, and took a careful inventory of the materials for my summer's work.

They consist of a rusty stove, a coal bucket, a battered piece of blackboard, a washbasin, four old desks with a few torn books in them, and a very flourishing hornets' nest.

I sat down on the only dry desk and waited until ten, but nobody came, so I refastened the door with the stove poker, and made my exit through a different window, for the sake of variety. It took me only about ten minutes to walk home. If it hadn't been muddy, I could have made it in five. I haven't been so



furious since the day you induced me to wade into the swamp after your pet frog, and howled with laughter when I couldn't get out.

In the afternoon I called on the angry father. "Pa" is certainly a son of the soil. He looks like a big, freshly dug ginseng bulb. We held our conversation in a straw-roofed shed with yellow drops of water filtering through.

"I reckon you're Bright's latest ideer of a teacher," he welcomed me.

"Indeed I'm not!" I snapped back. "I don't think he ever had an idea, in the first place."

I guess my voice carried conviction, for pa melted immediately, and we became quite friends. It seems that the school board have not appreciated pa's views on school matters.

Mrs. Barnes was amazed at the result of my visit, and forecasts all sorts of dire disasters if pa and I carry out our plans.

Oh, yes, I had a nice letter from Jane this evening. She says you have a new suit, and are a thing of beauty in it. Do be nice to Jane, and take her out occasionally, John. She's such a lovely girl, and you might have such nice times together.

You know I love you, John, and by October I know that nothing can restrain me from marrying you. Lovingly,
RUTH.

P. S.—Are you glad?

Good morning, John! This is Saturday morning, and I'm sitting out on a big hill, wearing Mrs. Barnes' sun-bonnet, and thinking of you. There may be a rattlesnake behind me, but I'm pretty sure there's not. If one happens later, I'll let you know about it.

Well, the first week is over, and I've lost five pounds and the remainder of my disposition, but the cheering thought of my fifteen dollars overbalances all else. It will pay for my hat and finish the installments on that infernal set of

Shakespeare. If you want to get over your fondness for something, buy it in installments.

Your letters and messages are all here. Thank you, but I fear my "heart's desire" is not growing in this vicinity. Sagebrush seems the chief crop, and lots of horned toads.

And I also understood the remark about Jane's "quiet sincerity." Besides being a nice expression, it is very true. I have always told you what a splendid girl Jane is, and I'm glad you're finding it out.

I see pa coming over the hill. Last night he brought us a *chicken*! You may not appreciate the wonder of that word, but had you lived on bacon out of the brine, and eggs out of the brine, and butter out of the brine, and every-



thing else ditto for a whole week, your mouth would water at the sight of a feather.

Pa and I seem to have a great many ideas in common. We have spent all this week doing things to that schoolhouse. Pa, William, Ellen, and Mrs. Barnes have all helped me. I've sent to Sheridan for sixty dollars' worth of things, and my heart is doubtful till I hear whether the board will pay for them or not.

You would have enjoyed seeing me painting the roof; that is, I painted some of it, and gave William ten cents to finish up because it got so slippery down near the edge. It's a pretty good-looking schoolhouse now; we're even going to have white curtains. I don't think the poor youngsters ever saw any in their lives. William told Mrs. Barnes:

"She's sure a funny kind o' teacher.

She ain't learned us nothin' but to wash our hands."

It seems that pa and the last teacher were not exactly congenial, so he instructed William to "show her where to head in," and William carried out his instructions by stabbing her in the wrist with his jackknife, whereupon the school board asked her to resign.

Poor little youngsters, they don't know any better, and I'm glad I took the school. But, oh, I'll be lots gladder when October comes, John! If you



buy that dear little bungalow in Evans-ton, we'll have plenty of room for me to entertain all my relations, won't we? Oh, that will be joyful, joyful!

Well, Mrs. Barnes has been over to the depot, and is now waving a dish towel at me, which means either a letter from you or another of those faithful bills.

Good-by, dear! I never loved you so much before!

RUTH.

My Schoolhouse.

Tuesday p. m., June 24.

DEAR JOHN: It's absolutely tragic to put in five hours a day trying to teach

two stupid children. I've jumped around till I'm exhausted, in a vain effort to teach William the word "jump." If I don't jump every time I point to it, he calls it "cow," but I suppose I'm to blame for his impression; so I've given it up, and let them have another recess, and now they're outside, happily throwing rocks at a fence post.

I wish you could see my pupils. How twelve years ever produced such a face as William's is beyond my understanding. He looks sixty. He keeps his left eye tight shut and his mouth half open, and he wasn't supplied with any forehead at all. Ellen has a vacant look, but is pretty. She has big brown eyes—just the kind you have always wished mine were. Yes, Jane's eyes are beautiful. I rather think you must be falling in love with her; are you?

You know I sit here and look at William and find myself thinking: "Now, is that his eye or is that his mouth? Is that his mouth or is that his eye?" Yesterday I snapped:

"William, close your mouth!" and he slowly closed the other eye. Somehow, I believe the nerves that regulate his mouth and eyes are crossed. Have you ever had any patients of that kind?

Friday night I am going to Sheridan—on a freight—and come back Sunday night the same way. Oh, the fresh things I will eat! I feel like a huge saltcellar.

All the supplies that I sent for have come, and also a cordial little note from Mr. Bright, which said, among other things:

"We ain't got money enough to buy out the Sheridan bookstores, so if them things get paid for, you'll haf to do it."

Think of that, John, when I've banked so much on pacifying that irate milliner! But she'll have to wait another month now. I'm glad I sent for them, just the same. It's really terrible when you think how little these children have had.



Neither one of them had ever seen any library paste before, and William ate up the entire bottle of it because he said it smelled so nice. Not that I consider the consumption of library paste necessary to their education, but I truly think, John, that I can do some real good out here, even if I only get William's eyes to work in unison.

But I agree with you that I *am* a little crazy, and I'm pretty sure I'll be worse before the summer's over, so if you want to fall in love with Jane, you might as well begin now. Who knows but what there is some man growing around these hills for me?

I must go to my jumping again. William is standing in the doorway, gazing right-eyedly at me. This awful fondness he is developing for me is a little more trying than having a jack-knife thrown at me occasionally. Lovingly,

RUTH.

At Home—later.

I found this primrose in the weeds on my way home to-night. It carries my best wishes for good luck with Jane.

Cottonwood.

Friday 17.

Good night! That's what I ought to be saying before I begin, for it's getting late, and my freight will soon be here; but there is too much news to save until I get home from Sheridan.

The most astounding things have happened. We have a cow! And we have six old hens, and a cellar; and I don't have to pay for any of the school materials I ordered; and, altogether, "God's in His heaven, all's right with

the world." Everything was the result of more prayer.

Wednesday afternoon, while I was seated at my official desk, watching William scrawl, "The jump can cow," and listening to Ellen spell, "T-u, two," a man on horseback loped up in front of the door and yelled, "Hi, there!"

"Hi, there!" I returned jovially—he was very good looking. "Won't you come in?"

I don't know what he had expected to see, but it was evident that I didn't fit his expectations. He swung off his horse and stared at me solemnly, while the children giggled.

"That's Bill Blair," hissed William audibly, but Mr. Blair ignored the introduction, and continued his solemn scrutiny, as if he had been suddenly paralyzed. So I began to feel sorry for him, and tried to put him more at ease.

"Do you wish to see about sending your children to school?" I asked pleasantly.

"He ain't got no kids," whispered William. And, "He ain't even married," Ellen further informed me in a loud whisper.

I felt my lips beginning to tremble, but Mr. Blair might well have been chief mourner at a funeral.

"Are *you* the teacher whom Mr. Bright employed?" he finally asked.

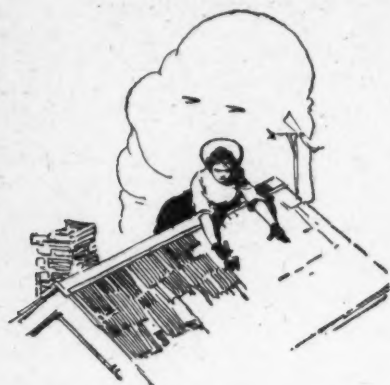
"Yes, sir," I replied, surprised into meekness by his correct English.

"Crackety snort! I came over to fire you!" he announced gently, but the sincere apology in his voice was entirely lost on William, who bellowed fiercely:

"You better not fire her! I'll tell pa to kill you if you do!"

"And he'll do it, too," seconded Ellen.

They looked like a couple of little furies, and William joined forces with Ellen over in the corner by the water



bucket, where she carried on the campaign with tearful shrieks:

"She's learnin' us grammar—an'—an'—an' how to make little umbrels out o' corks an' plum thorns, an'—an' we're gettin' awful good, an'—an'—"

"An' nobody ain't ever learnt me to read before, an' to take off my hat," continued William, glaring one-eyedly at the man, who grew very red and removed his Stetson; but William was unconscious of any criticism, and went on wildly: "An'—an' my pa killed a sheep-herder oncet an' he'll do it to you, too," he promised.

"Well, if this don't beat the devil!" gasped the cause of the disturbance. "Can't you stop 'em, or send 'em home—or something?"

William awaited no second invitation. With his left eye tight shut, but his good one full of vengeance, he bolted through the door and departed on a lope over the hill. Ellen pulled my head down to impart the damp little message:

"Pa'll be right back with his gun an' shoot him."

After they were gone, Mr. Blair produced the itemized bill from the bookstore which had so upset Mr. Bright. But the end of the story is the cellar, cow, and chickens. By the time pa arrived, gunless, but profane, we were out staking off the yard to have it plowed up for grass seed, and every one went home happy.

Mr. Blair lives on a real ranch—not the dry kind—about twenty miles away, over near the mountains; and Mrs. Barnes says he is a rich cattleman, and quite prejudiced against all things feminine. However, he stayed for supper Wednesday night, and dug us a slam-gorgeous cellar. It's larger than a wash-tub, and is nice and cold because it is so near the spring. Two of his men brought over the cow and chickens today—six old Plymouth Rock hens and a beautiful red cow. I am going to learn to milk next week. Mrs. Barnes does it beautifully.

Before I stop, I must thank you for all the nice medicine you sent. Mrs. Barnes has tried nearly every kind except the bottle labeled, "For Rattlesnake Bites." I think I will wear a little string of tiny bottles around my neck, so as to be prepared for all the calamities you mention.

I will drop you a postal from Sheridan, and I faithfully promise to write the "really serious" epistle that you request, when I get back again.

Good night! I hear the freight train tooting 'way off in the hills. I don't exactly know how to produce the "warmer tone" in my letters which you suggest, but will try to close this letter in a satisfactory manner, after the pattern of those Arabian letters we once read.

John, beloved of all that I am and hope to be, feel not that we are apart, for my love is boundless as the universe and is ever present to infold you.

Ah—good night!

P. S.—My little, breathy name sounded so silly after the above utterance that I am omitting it.

POST CARD.

Sheridan, Wyoming.

June 19.

Having a splendid time. Went to an Elks' dance last night. Mr. Blair and his sister were there. She's lovely. I'm going to their ranch to spend next Sunday.

R. L.

Monday Evening.

Front (also back) doorstep.

Good evening! Hot—isn't it? It must be terrible in Chicago. I'm back once more to the new cow and sage-brush. This time I was piloted over from the train by Mrs. Barnes and a lantern. And what do you think has grown in our yard while I was away? A tent; and two United States surveyors inside of it. As we passed, we heard one of them say:

"Jim, the schoolma'am is arriving."

And his friend grunted: "Shut up! I'm so sick of homely females now that——"

Mrs. Barnes wouldn't let me listen to any more. They're going to board with her for a whole month. She says that one of them has black hair, and is handsome. Bravo! The world grows gayer. I haven't seen them yet. They're off on the hand car with the Greeks.

And that makes me think that I haven't told you about the Greeks. There are ten of them. They work on the railroad, and live in a car on a side-track about four hundred yards from us.

One day they took me for a ride on their hand car and a freight train came along and had to wait for us to get off the track. Oh, I'm having lots of good times. The engineer was furious, but now he toots twice and waves at us every time he goes through Cottonwood.

One of the Greeks is a very superior boy. He was in the university over there, and came to the United States for experience; and as nearly as I can understand it, is doing this sort of work so that he can write a series of papers on the Greek laborer in America. So far, he runs at my approach, and I have not heard him utter a word, though Mrs. Barnes says he talks like a book of poetry—which isn't bad for Mrs. Barnes. She bakes pies for them, and does his washing.

I must stop now. Mrs. Barnes and I are going to walk over the hills to another lady dry farmer's house to buy some eggs. Our hens refuse to lay. Please send us some medicine to induce them to further efforts. Red pepper has no effect.

If I'm not too tired when I get back, I'll write the "serious" things I want to say. Good-bye for now,

RUTH.

P. S.—I'm back—but I'm too tired.

Wednesday Night.

On a hill. Just sunset.

DEAR, DEAR JOHN: I've come 'way off here by myself so that I can talk to you as seriously as possible—about us. It's a beautiful evening; the sun is coloring all the hilltops a hazy red, and it's so very still that it makes you almost want to cry out into the silence, and yet you never do. There is absolutely no sound except the occasional twitter of a little lonesome ground bird.

Well—to begin: In the first place, I'm not a serious person—outwardly, as





you have often lamented. But 'way down deep inside of me there is something very, very serious. So serious, in fact, that I can't talk of the way I feel when that something has hold of me, and I can't think of trying to describe it to some one else.

I think my life as a child, of being tossed around into the different households of undesiring aunts, has made me the way I am. As a youngster, I never dared tell of the wonderful dreams and ideas I had because I was ridiculed for it, and thought to be a very untruthful youngster. And gradually that "something" which I can't define crept back farther and farther, until now no one except myself ever dreams of its existence; and every one considers me a jubilant, hilariously happy individual.

But, John, I truly don't regard things so lightly as you evidently think. And, above all else, I do not regard your love for me lightly. It has only been your faith in me that has kept me tied to the path that leads to what I ought to be. From my littlest girlhood I have known that in some way you would help lighten my griefs and make me think they didn't amount to much, anyway. *Why* you have given me this love I have never questioned, until the past year while I have been away from you. And now I realize that you are the only man I have ever known, and that I am the only girl you have allowed to come into your life.

When I came out here, you remember, you told me that you would trust me as implicitly as if I were your wife.

But that is not right. I can't live up to such a trust, because I have never before understood that men and women ought to choose their mates, and not simply grow up, as you and I have done, with the idea of marrying one another. I have always known that of course I was to marry you. I didn't know exactly when, but whenever you insisted sufficiently.

After you graduated and commenced practicing, you didn't want me right away, and so I sat patiently at Aunt Jane's house and waited until you should. And then, when you began to want me all at once, something seemed to tell me that I was making a mistake, and I made up my mind, to the great horror of all my relatives, to come out West and see if I could learn in a year what the matter was.

I haven't learned yet, John. But I do know that it would be wrong for me to marry you, feeling as I now do. I have hesitated about telling you, because it seemed that I couldn't give up the great, happy part of my life that you fill. If you don't want to go on loving me, without being engaged to me, I'll simply have to endure it, that's all. But it doesn't seem to me as if I *could* stand it.

Of course, you know I love you. Far more than all other things in the world put together. But I *must* be free, and fight my own battle out for myself. When you get this letter, I wish you would send me a message. If you think we can go on loving each other and writing just as we have been, and tell-

ing each other the exact truth about things, please just say, "I hope your plan will succeed." But if you think we can't do that way, please say, "Don't think plan will work."

And don't worry about me, John. I'll be all right. Now I must go straight to the depot and mail this, or I never will have the courage to send it. I do love you, John.

RUTH.

*Friday Night.
Same Hill.*

MY DEAR PLATONIC FRIEND: Your message came, and I guess it puzzled the depot man most to death. It would take him more time than his life will allow to find out what it means—bless you!

I never have been happier than I am right this minute, and yes, indeed, I will play fair, and tell you everything that happens. These last three days have been something terrible. I have felt just as if I were walking toward the edge of a thousand-foot cliff and that the arrival of your telegram would push me off into nowhere.

But I might have known it would lift me back onto firm ground again. There! The sun has just slipped down and I'll have to hurry, for we have almost no twilight here among the hills, and the stars come out almost as soon as the sun quits.

It's no wonder, John dear, that my letters sound like extracts from a "Second Reader," for yours are nothing but a series of question marks—as if you might be examining a patient for a lunatic asylum. Now I ill do my duty by your last list.

1.—My health is splendid. If I keep on, I will weigh a long ton by October.

2.—Pa, I am sure, has only the kindest intentions. He has been most gentlemanly, I assure you, but he

won't bring us any more chickens because we have our own now.

3.—No one ever has sunstroke out here, and I always wear Mrs. Barnes' pink sun-bonnet.

4.—There are a good many rattlesnakes, but I am very careful, and carry a big stick all the time.

William and I killed one yesterday with eleven rattles. The next one I am going to kill all by myself.

5.—Mr. Blair did not discharge me, because he thought I was a good teacher, I suppose. He's about thirty years old, I should judge. And he dug the cellar with a spade.

6.—I am going to the ranch with his sister—just his sister. She's coming for me on horseback, early in the morning.

7.—Yes, we get our drinking water from the spring. There aren't any streams out in these hills. I've never seen any vermin in it except a few bugs and a frog or two.

8.—I went to the Elks' dance with the lawyer about whom I have told you frequently, but nothing happened to confess.

I am so glad you and Jane went to the Turkish ball. Were there as many pretty dresses this year as usual? Why, yes, I think she would like a book, but I'm going to give her another piece of silver for her dressing table. Her set is the standard-line pattern. Why don't you get her a puff box? I know she would like that. Let's see, she's twenty-four this year. Gracious! Aren't we getting old?

In a minute it will be pitch dark, and here comes Mr. Heald, the surveyor,



after me. I must tell you about him in my next letter. I've always wanted to be some one's platonic friend, and I ought to do pretty well at it when I'm two thousand miles away. Good night!

RUTH.

P. S.—Those cards you sent me to “exercise” William’s eyes are doing wonders. The left eye doesn’t stay open very much yet, but his mouth stays closed quite a good deal. If I should ever quit being your platonic friend, don’t you think it would be nice to have William for an office boy?

Prairie Dog, Wyoming.

Big Corrals Ranch.

Sunday, June 26.

Oh, John, do you think I’m subject to rheumatism? I feel as if I’d had it

just as pretty as she can be. The cowboys are quite mad about her, and she rides as well as they. Poor me! I suppose we will trot all the time this afternoon.

Last night we sang songs out on the porch until nearly midnight. The “Whispering Devil” played a mouth harp. He is a soft-voiced cowboy, from Texas. To-night, the boys are going to ride steers and bucking horses in the moonlight.

Then, in the morning, at five o’clock, Mr. Blair is to drive me back to the dry regions. I heard the Whispering Devil tell the boys last night:

“This is where we take a back seat. We can be trusted to take over the cow and a few old hens, but the boss sees to it that the lady gets home.”



forever. Surely no twelve-mile horse-back ride could make me feel like this. Why, every part of me is stiff—except my teeth, which seem to be loosened. And they are going to take me out to the round-up wagon this afternoon for another joy ride.

You see, I’m ashamed to tell them how I feel, because I told them I could ride. I honestly thought I could, but it was a fearful mistake. *How* that horse trotted!

This is a slam-gorgeous ranch—the real thing. Lots of cowboys, bunk houses, an Irish cook, granite dishes to eat off of, a fat housekeeper, hundreds of saddle horses, and enough cattle to eat up Chicago.

Miss Blair is a charming girl, and

And I do feel a little conceited to think he’s noticed me at all, for he’s such a lady hater; but I think it’s because he wants his sister to have a friend out here, so she won’t get lonesome. I roped a post this morning. Platonically,

RUTH.

Wednesday Noon.

At pa’s spring.

JOHN DEAR: Prepare for my first confession, according to our platonic rules.

We brought our lunches down here to the spring, so we could eat in the shade of the chaparral bush, for I doubt if there’s even *one* place hotter than that schoolhouse at noon. William and Ellen are over on the next hillside, chas-

ing a grasshopper in order to determine the number of his legs; which means at least half an hour in which I may unburden my transgressions.

In the first place, I will tell you that I am still a nice girl, so that you won't grow nervous during the recital. And the whole affair is really *your* fault, for you should have explained to me the way gentlemen act when they wish to be playfully loving, but not serious. Having been accustomed to none but your own deeply serious ways, I supposed that the slightest approach to sentiment meant either a stepping-stone to matrimony or to disgrace, and came near to my death in consequence.

Well—to begin—

Last Thursday evening the moon came up early, big and round; so Mr. Heald suggested that we take a moonlight walk, while Mrs. Barnes and the other surveyor constructed a coyote trap. It honestly never occurred to me that in the very best circles young ladies were not wandering about for miles in uninhabited hills with unrecommended gentlemen; but our knees had become so well acquainted during their week's communion under Mrs. Barnes' tiny table that I regarded him quite as an old friend.

After we were out of sight of the shanty, he suggested that I should take his arm, to insure safer walking; but as the moon was very bright and the cow paths very narrow, I felt the suggestion unnecessary. However, it took a rather heated argument to convince him of my sincerity in the matter, at the end of which he praised me greatly, and commended my independence and pluck and womanliness and everything else that is lovely. For a while I felt quite touched, especially when he assured me of my superiority over other girls, and told me how very different I was from all others of my sex.

We were walking leisurely along in the cow path, Mr. Heald close behind

me, approaching a great red rock that threw a shadow over the hillside, and I was just beginning to think that here certainly was a man who appreciated my true worth, when suddenly, from starry skies, fell this thunderbolt in the most alluring of tones:

"As soon as we get into the shadow of that rock, *somebody* is going to get kissed."

My mind stopped short; so did my feet; and as he kept on walking, he bumped right into me. I presume he thought I was awaiting a prompt fulfillment of his promise, for before I could move, both his arms were around me, and I found my head tilted back on his shoulder. And the kiss was descending!

I lived about seven years in that tenth of a second, and heard again every word of my various aunties' frequent lectures on a girl's self-respect and lack of prudence. Yet I had walked blindly into the end of all things, for his face was—was, oh, it was very different from your face when *you* kiss me.

But I got away—before the kiss happened. From my present knowledge of the ways of gentlemen, he evidently thought my struggles were merely efforts to appear modest and maidenly, for he laughed out, as he reached for me again:

"Oh, *don't* kick up such a fuss, little one! Why do girls always want to raise such a rumpus? Can't you see I'm crazy about you?"

Yes, I could see it. Plainly. I think I called him a beast, and implored him to go away, but I haven't a very definite memory of just what I *did* say. Anyhow, he only kept on laughing in horrid little chuckles and I kept on backing away from him.

"I—I guess I'm not the kind of girl you think I am—I'm—I'm awfully sorry," I heard myself stammering.

Think of it, John! To be apologizing for being only as nice as I am.

But for some unknown reason I never *had* felt so humbly apologetic, though I was frightened to death. He roared with laughter at my apology, and muttered admiringly:

"You pretty little witch! Really, you're a treat! Why, *everybody* does this sort of thing. Oh, I say, I *will* have a kiss!"

The last I remember was seeing him leap over a sagebrush toward me, and dimly I heard my voice a long way off saying:

"If John were here, I know he would kill you!"

I'm not very accustomed to fainting spells, so when I recovered, I felt as if I might have been dead for some little time, and couldn't locate myself at all. And here comes the wonderful part of the story. I woke up in another man's arms. Don't be alarmed. It was no plot. The man was Mr. Blair, and he was half kneeling in the path, patting my head with a wet handkerchief, and murmuring through a mouthful of my bone hairpins:

"Poor little kid! Poor little kid! It's too damned bad!"

And all at once I was just as satisfied as if it had been you, and not at all afraid. So I laughed. I am ashamed of it, but really you

know it *was* funny to have him drop right out of the moonlight when he should have been thirty miles away, and it didn't seem possible that anything awful had happened.

"Hello!" I said. "Did God send you over?"

He boosted me to my feet and stood



me up with a jerk, as if I had suddenly burned his fingers. I wobbled a minute, but managed to remember how to stand up.

"Well, this is a *fine* way to act!" he said scornfully. "Do you faint on every man who tries to kiss you?"

He said it so seriously, and seemed so put out about it, and Mr. Heald was nowhere to be seen, and I couldn't find a glimmer of light on the whole thing; so I did something that I haven't done for a year. I began to cry. And little drops of whisky trickled down out of my hair—he had dampened his handkerchief from his whisky flask—so I truly must have been a pitiful object.

Now this is the part you won't like.

For then he *did* kiss me—a lot of times, I think—and put his arms around me, and I didn't care at all. I was *glad*. I stayed there five minutes and cried all I wanted to, while he patted my shoulder and kissed me occasionally. But, John, they were your very own kind of kisses, and I knew it wasn't wrong, and as soon as he *could*, without appearing rude, he freed me and began to explain matters.

It seems he was riding home from Sheridan, and came through Cottonwood to see about shipping some range cattle from here. So he stopped at Mrs. Barnes' to see us a minute, and followed the path Mrs. Barnes told him we had taken, so that he could just say, "How do you do," and tell me his sister would be over Friday night to take me back to the ranch early Saturday morning. He intended staying all night not far from here.

On the way he met Mr. Heald running back to the shanty as hard as he could go, to get some water and Mrs. Barnes. He told Mr. Blair:

"I've been all kinds of a damned fool



and scared Miss Lane nearly to death. I didn't suppose she was an escaped infant."

And then Mr. Blair went on to enlighten me in a very fatherly manner concerning the ways of really respectable young ladies and gentlemen who wish, as I have said, to be playfully loving and not serious. My dense ignorance comes, of course, from never having known any kind of masculine ways except those of yourself. But I didn't tell Mr. Blair that.

In a very little while Mrs. Barnes, Mr. Snow—the other surveyor—and Mr. Heald came running over the hills, and then we had a very funny time—I mean, a very peculiar time. I acted as supreme judge, and Mr. Heald was the most penitent culprit you can imagine. He truly *was* sorry. He called himself all kinds of names, and reviewed the whole incident with entire accuracy. From every one's attitude toward the subject, I gather that all girls demur exactly as I did, but expect to be induced after due length of time to be respectably embraced. But it was news to me. At the close of his humble apologies, he said:

"Why, Miss Lane, I honestly didn't suppose there was such a girl as you are in the whole world."

"Well, I guess she does lead the list," Mr. Blair added.

Then I remembered that *he* had found me most accessible for kissing, but he seemed to have forgotten it, and I didn't recall it to him.

And pretty soon we all went home over the hills most jubilantly, Mr. Blair leading his horse, and all of us singing "Everybody's Doing It." Before he rode away, an hour or so later, Mr. Blair came over to me and said—just exactly as you'd have said it:

"Don't worry about *us*, little girl. I felt just as if it had been Nancy." Nancy is his sister.

Gracious! Where *are* William and Ellen? They've been gone an hour. This is a great way to teach school. Now I shall have to chase over these hills after them.

Good-by in a hurry. RUTH.

P. S.—By the time they caught the grasshopper, he had only five legs, so *where* is the value of zoölogy in Cottonwood?

Friday Night, July 1.

DEAR JOHN: I've washed. Terrible ordeal! When I've expressed my ideas upon you and Jane, I'll tell you about it.



I think what you have found out is lovely—lovely—lovely! And I know you'll go right on finding out more and more, for there are so many splendid traits in Jane that you never stop discovering new ones. Oh, this platonic plan of ours is going to work out both our salvations. For, John dear, I *know* that there is no finer girl in the world than Jane, but won't it be funny if, after all these years, you do seriously—what other word can be ascribed to you—fall in love with her?

I can see from her letters—the dear, honest thing!—that she is beginning to worry about loving both of us; so I think, *of course*, that you should tell her of our arrangement, because it won't be fair unless she understands.

Oh, wonderful world! I'm just beginning to get into the swing of it. Swing on! Swing on! And never let the old cat die.

As to how a dry hill's washing is conducted—

I hurried home from school, nearly melted, got into an apron and very little else, put two coal-oil cans into Mrs. Barnes' little express wagon, and went to the spring, which is a quarter of a mile around the hill. Then I filled the cans with a quart dipper, tied a cloth over them so they wouldn't slop, and began my homeward journey. The water here is so hard that one can scarcely even *pull* it.

One has to be very careful with these express wagons. You hold the tongue at just the proper angle and walk backward. I did splendidly, and was on the home stretch, when I struck a bump and away went the water. I had to wait half an hour for the spring to fill up again, but now I'm a connoisseur at bump dodging.

"Take a can of lye for each can of water, to break it," Mrs. Barnes told me.

It didn't faze the water much, but the skin on my hands is a thing of the past. The surveyors came home at the hanging-out stage, and I was so full of despair and lye that I let them hang out every single thing. You just spread the clothes around on the sagebrush, you know. They seemed to enjoy it.

The only requirement that I shall make of a husband is that he furnish a wash lady to go with him. I am nearly dead.

Nancy Blair came over for me this evening, and we're going to sleep outside, right under the stars. We hope a coyote will come and investigate us, for we have connected our bed to the surveyors' tent with a long rope, which has a cow bell on the end of it, and if one *does* come, we can wake up the men, and they will come and shoot it, so I can have a coyote rug. Nancy is out there now, calling to me at minute intervals to hurry up, so I must stop;

though for some strange reason I feel that I could write all night.

I still have a little note to write Jane to wish her a happy birthday. To think of your saying you found yourself really wanting to kiss her good night! Why, John! To *want* to kiss any one but me! Well, I am truly glad, for I love you both, but it does seem a trifle queer.

Good night, John dear. RUTH.

POST CARD.

*Fourth of July.
Big Corral Ranch.*

Hurrah for these salaried holidays! We're having a hilarious celebration, with cowboys swarming everywhere. The Blairs are giving me a saddle horse to keep for the summer. I ride home this p. m. RUTH.

*Sagebrush Shanty.
Sunday, July 10.*

Good morning. All of your cheering letters are arriving regularly, and are my only comfort in this time of trouble; for if this writing hasn't already told you that something is the matter with my right hand, I will now do so.

No, it was neither rattlesnake nor William's jackknife that caused my left-handedness. I just naturally fell off of Worry. And Worry is my horse. He's in no sense a broncho, but only a nice, rather aged, and very placid animal, considered exceptionally safe. But last Monday afternoon, as I was riding home from the ranch—alone—he chose to become tremendously frightened at a ground bird, and leaped madly to one side, leaving me sitting in the air, and, later, very forcibly, on the ground. I sat first upon the point of my right elbow, which wasn't able to stand the shock, and so broke. And that is what is the matter with me. Oh, how it did hurt!

Worry stood as quiet as a lamb, won-

dering, I guess, what sort of a thing they had given him for a rider now. I couldn't cry and I couldn't get up and I couldn't muster courage to examine my arm. I just sat there for years, it seemed to me, and groaned. Worry became disgusted and went to nibbling grass. But out here in these endless hills, one is never alone, and my rescuer appeared shortly on a hard run, his straight black hair flying like a mane from his head. It was the poetry-book Greek, who had witnessed the downfall from another hilltop. He acted exactly as if he had known me all his life, yanked hold of my arm, cut back the sleeve, and said matter-of-factly:

"Great hurt—much sorry."

Then he twisted my elbow around in various directions, until he had it where he wanted it. I really should welcome instant death in preference to a tenth of such pain again. I screamed until the hills echoed, for my bravery takes wings the minute I'm the least bit hurt.

When he had completed the twisting, he began making gestures and chattering faster than a magpie; and at last I understood that he wanted bandages, and was suggesting my petticoat. But since I was wearing a riding habit, I didn't have any, at which he seemed much surprised, but not at all embarrassed. So he tore the sleeves out of his shirt and out of my blouse, and improvised some splendid bandages. You would have deeply appreciated his professional manner. He helped me get on Worry again, and insisted on leading him home, walking along like a sentinel, silent and grim. Just before we tipped the last hill, he handed me the reins with the short remark:

"I am Thyrrors, Miss Lane. Fix your arm in the morning early. Right this place. Good-by, sweet lady."

Then he gave Worry's hips a sharp spat and sent me on over the hill, a very dilapidated-looking "sweet lady," indeed, and very sick of the whole world in general. Mrs. Barnes met me at the gate with eyes and mouth equally wide open.

I had gathered that "Thyrrors" preferred that I should not mention his share in the affair, so I omitted him entirely when I told about it and gave myself all the credit. But when the surveyors came home, they insisted upon taking off the bandages to see if the arm was set correctly; so, of course, they found two pink-striped shirt sleeves and demanded explanations. But I remained true to my rescuer, and explained that Miss

Blair had given me a lot of old things to use to wash the blackboards, and that I had gotten them from the bundle that was tied back of my saddle. After the men had gone to their tent, Mrs. Barnes said:

"I don't wash those shirt sleeves every week not to recognize them when I see them. Now what are you up to with that Greek?"

Oh ho! So she went with me in the morning just before sunup, and Thyrrors was awaiting us like a god of the morning, with an array of bottles and instruments that would have done *you* credit.

"In our country—learn all things," he explained briefly. But he raved like a hero in ancient history when he discovered that they had touched my arm.

"Cursed fiends! Ignorant animals!" he kept muttering. He is the only person on earth, I think, of whom Mrs. Barnes is the least in awe.



He had made what looks to be half of a kitchen colander out of a tin can, and he bound my arm up in that. But the minute he had finished, he gathered up his belongings and departed with a soft "Good-by, sweet ladies." I can't imagine why he is so ashamed of knowing us.

Well, I never will finish this episode if I don't simply *stop!* I've taught school all week just the same, and have ridden Worry back and forth. Mrs. Barnes rides behind me and opens the gates, and then returns and comes for me at night.

How long do you think it will be before I am well? I wish you had sent me some medicine for broken elbows. I haven't slept at all since last Monday, and I'm beginning to get a little tired out. But I have my hat paid for—and the Shakespeare. Life has its compensations.

I hope Jane isn't letting you wear red neckties with your summer flannels, and think you must be enjoying lots of patients to afford three new suits at once.

With—I scarcely know what. I'm becoming somewhat dazed as to "us." I think I'll begin closing my letters without any "withs."

RUTH.

Friday Morning. Early.

Schoolhouse.

DEAR JOHN: Twenty-three years old, and improving rapidly. Do you know that yesterday was the very first of my birthdays since I was eight years old that you have forgotten? But I realize that your telegram must have cost enough to do for half a dozen birthday presents. I never knew before that one could send a book by telegram, but I surely appreciate your being worried enough to do it.

I forgot to tell you that Thyrrors *did* bind my arm out straight. Mr. Heald had bandaged it in a bent position, but Thyrrors evidently has your very own ideas on broken elbows, and proceeded,

I think, exactly as you advised. It doesn't hurt any more, and I have been sleeping well for three nights; and I wiggle my fingers according to your instructions.

As to your last few letters—

Of course, I knew you wouldn't be pleased about the surveyor episode, but if these confessions grieve you so, John dear, why do you demand such thorough recitals? I can vividly picture Aunt Jane's horrified features when you talked matters over with her; but please understand that the Blairs are lovely people, and I shall not welcome any more suggestions about Mr. Blair. Of course, he has not kissed me again. I have not *needed* to be kissed since then. Your letters imply that I am spending the summer in the arms of some gentleman or other. It is a mistake. Please do not refer to it again.

And Mr. Heald, whom you appellate as a "low ruffian," has proven himself my very good friend, and I like him. Perhaps I *should* have scorned to notice him thereafter, but it would have been a ridiculous state of affairs; for out in this desolate country you appreciate any kind of a human being, affectionate or otherwise. Both he and his friend are soon to leave, and I'm sorry. It will mean less to eat. Besides, we sing evenings, and it isn't so lonely. Mrs. Barnes sings alto—the same alto for all selections, which gives an original and weird effect.

The pictures Jane sent are fine. I think you look thinner than when I left, but Jane is lovely; especially in the one where she is standing in the long window. I was *so* surprised that you finally bought the house. It certainly is a beauty in the pictures, and I should think Jane's idea about the library is a good one. No, she didn't write me anything about it except that you and she went out to see the house again before you decided definitely.

I see William and Ellen coming over

the hill, swinging their dinner bucket between them. William's eye is doing beautifully. I must tell you about my birthday before they get here.

Last night Mrs. Barnes didn't come for me, and I was just starting out afoot, when I heard a most unusual and cityfied noise; and what should loom into sight but a great red automobile, just like yours. My heart stopped stock-still—but it wasn't you!

It was Mr. Blair and Nancy in his brand-new car, with Mrs. Barnes, looking like a newly varnished aristocrat, in the back seat. What a time we had! They took us to the ranch for dinner, and home in the moonlight, and I can tell you these roads keep up your interest every minute when you're in an auto. I bumped my arm a good deal, and it hurts some this morning.

William is here with a fresh horned toad to dissect, so must close.

As always,

RUTH.

P. S.—Forgot to tell you of my lovely presents. A slam-gorgeous coyote rug from Mr. Heald and his friend. A washing machine!!!! from the Blairs. And lots to eat. A mammoth cake with twenty-three wild forget-me-nots on it, from Mrs. Barnes. A many-colored motto with the cheering thought, "Love rules the world," from William and Ellen. A beautiful, beautiful little book, which I can't read, from Thyrrors.

Thursday, July 21.

Deserted Doorstep.

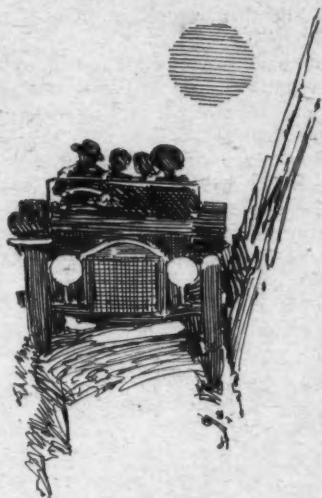
DEAR JOHN: How lonesome it is without the surveyors' tent! In the absence of which I sit down to chronicle my first proposal and to prove to you that Mr. Heald did not consider me a "common lady," at all.

It happened last night on this very doorstep, and it was quite sad. Mrs. Barnes and Mr. Snow were cleaning out the spring, so Mr. Heald and I were alone, shelling peas that pa had sent us. It was early dusk, and the Greeks

were chanting their weird songs down at their car; so romance was plentiful.

"Take it for granted that I'm a rav-ing imbecile," he said suddenly, keenly intent on a huge pea pod, "but I wonder if anything I could say or do would induce you to marry me."

I must say it was rather different from the proposals I've dreamed about, but something in his face made it very far from funny, so we put the peas aside and went for a walk, while I tried



to tell him as gently as possible that I thought nothing could.

I have read that all girls feel very full of sympathy for the men they don't want to marry, and I guess it's true, for I *did* feel so sorry for him that, on the way back, I told him I'd like to tell him good-by in my own way—and I did. But I shan't bore you with the details.

Oh, John, but it has been a long summer! I wonder how many more people will wander into my life.

Now I must go to cot. I washed again to-night. Thyrrors turned the new washing machine. He's an expert at everything. He showed me a picture

of his sweetheart, to-night. Every one has a sweetheart—but Mr. Heald and me. Dismally,

RUTH.

P. S.—My arm is better, thank you.

Monday Morning.

Just sunup.

JOHN DEAR: Indeed, it is just sun-up—for I have found out what the matter was, so my year's searching has not been in vain. I didn't write you last night when I got back from Blairs' and first read your letter, because I feared I wouldn't be able to make myself coherent.

Oh, I love you, John! I know I do. Nothing in the whole world can make me ever doubt it again. I want you so, and am so lonesome for you, that there is a constant hurting in my throat which nearly chokes me whenever I think of you.

I know now that the thing I feared was only that my love for you was the sort of love one has for a brother, or even a father, for that matter. But it isn't. You're the one person I *don't* have such a love for, and if you can ever forgive me, John, I'll try all my life to make you just as happy as I can, and to do just as you want me to, forever and forever. I realize that I shall probably go on making mistakes, even with all my good intentions, but I'm comforted by what you said to me once at Aunt Jane's:

"Nothing makes me happier, Sunshine, than to help you with your funny little troubles."

And what queer ways you've often taken!

Oh, John, I've thought you really were in love with Jane—and it has nearly killed me. But I would rather that it had than to have had you guess that I wasn't glad for both of you. But in this last letter you don't mention her,

and I can see in every line that you still love me as you always have, and I've cried over it until it is nothing but a professional blur.

You needn't have worried about Mr. Blair, for how could I begin to care for any one else, when my heart was already crowded with you?

It seems I wander on and say nothing, but there is a little song singing around my head, and I can't think clearly. You never can know how weary I am of these great, lonely hills; and of bathing in a washtub; and of looking at a rough board ceiling when I wake up mornings; and of sagebrush and barbed-wire fences and rattlesnakes and Greeks and salted meat and funny people and *school-teaching!*

How I long to have you tell me to drop everything and come straight home, for I shall be packed to leave on the next train. Still, it wouldn't be right for me to leave, when I've promised to stay through August. I suppose I'll have to stay, no matter what happens, but perhaps you will come out for a week or so, won't you? And make the waiting a little easier. You've often said you wanted to, so I'm really not forward in suggesting it.

Good-by, dear big man, whom I love and have loved and will love all of my life.

RUTH.

TELEGRAM.

Thursday, July 28.

Cottonwood, Wyoming.

TO JOHN SHEPHERD, SHERIDAN ROAD, CHICAGO, ILL.

Please return unopened the letter you will receive to-day. By mistake, I inclosed a personal letter to another in your envelope. Shall appreciate its prompt return.

RUTH LANE.



Friday, July 29.

On a new hill. Alone.

DEAREST JANE AND JOHN: Blessed blind ones—did you think I hadn't seen Cupid between the lines in your letters for over a month? Your last letter was so heavy with news that it was a day late in getting here, hence this seeming tardiness in my congratulations.

I can't help thinking how tragic it would have been—for me, if I had stayed at home and been present during the time you were discovering your destiny, for, of course, you would have found it, regardless of my whereabouts, and then all my dear friends would have said, "Poor Ruth, how hard this must be for you!" as if they were laying flowers on my folded hands.

If it weren't so unpedagogical, I should have begun this letter with a huge "I told you so!" for haven't I always said you were made for no other purpose than each other? Oh, I am a lady of discernment.

Now, Jane—for I *must* get in a little advice—don't you think of being married in anything but white, even though your grandfather is a recent angel. He'll appreciate white all the more. Here is a place, John, to begin wielding your authority and to insist on a white bride. And please see that I get a large piece of wedding cake so that I can dream me a gentleman of my own.

Nothing would so tempt me to resign this sagebrush position as to be at a wedding of you two people; but if you are going to take Cupid by the forelock, I'm afraid I won't be able to come. I *think* I will have money enough to come in September, but I realize that a lovely house with fresh curtains all up and hemstitched dish towels hanging in suspense cannot be neglected for the sake of one more wedding guest.

Besides—listen! I have had a secret for an entire week. I *was* going to keep

it a whole year, but your burst of news makes me want to tell my little bit.

For some one wants to marry me, too; a very fine, splendid some one, with broad shoulders like John, and the same kind of a heart. At first I thought he was going to fall in love with your picture, Jane. I told him how very nice you are, and how wonderfully you sing, so that you can make even hardened male creatures weep; and he always looked at your picture and said nice things about it when he came over. But I think the broken elbow turned his heart in my favor.

His chief reason for wanting me is because, as he says, I will be such a happy thing to have to come home to. Oh, he is not romantic, but he is unusually good material for a husband. Thyrrors, who is wisdom itself, told me the other night over the washing machine:

"He grand man. Look much love at you. Oh, yes."

But we will not be in such wild haste as you two, for even though I want to ever so much, I don't seem capable of falling in love. And he has decreed that we will wait a year, for he declares he will *never* marry me until I love him properly. Nancy doesn't know yet. We are going to tell her to-morrow, for, of course, there is no doubt but that in a year my heart will come to its senses.

I hear a familiar chugging over the hills. They are coming to take me to the ranch for over Sunday, so good night, both of you—my two dear friends whom I love best in the world. There is no need to wish you happiness. It will grow in your footsteps.

John Shepherd—in the conventional black—with a red necktie. Oh, I can just see you!

RUTH.

Monday Night. Late.

In the middle of my bed.

Oh, Jane—*dear* Jane! I'm too happy to sleep, and hope you can distinguish

enough from these wabbly little marks to know that I'm *trying* to write you the lovingest letter of my life.

He's here! And the red necktie decorates the rack with the dish towels, for I made him take it off and turn down his collar band and up his sleeves, to see if he could look like a cowboy. He can't. Just now he's soundly sleeping out in the yard in a little round tent that Mrs. Barnes borrowed from the depot man. Poor Mrs. Barnes! She says little, but looks volumes. You see, she is quite fond of Mr. Blair, and this sudden appearance of John has somewhat upset *her* ideas as well as mine.

When she had finished giving John very thorough instructions as to how to sleep on the ground and not take cold, she came in to me and demanded fiercely:

"Girl, which one of them two men are you going to ditch—poor devils?"

"Why, Mr. Blair is going to marry Jane," I returned blandly; upon which followed the explosion. But we are friends again now. And you *are* going to marry him, Jane. I know it. Don't you remember my instincts of a fortune teller?

I have told him just exactly why I couldn't love him, and he understands all about everything; so when he knows John is here, I truly think he will be glad—and, naturally, he will revert to your picture. Then this fall we are to have a big hunting trip, and you will come out, and lo, the path is plain! Don't argue with me. John is going to take his first vacation now, and stay until the middle of September. I think we'll be married next Wednesday, or perhaps on this coming Sunday. We had so much to talk about that we couldn't decide for certain.



Mrs. Barnes has a cousin, just arrived from Maine, who will take the school; so it seems that the whole world is arranging itself to accommodate me.

But there's no disputing the fact that John's plan *was* an idiotic one, and I'm glad you didn't approve of it. He says he had to force you to take part in it. Why, if I hadn't found out for myself that I loved him, he could have engaged himself to all the girls in Christendom, and I should only have engaged myself to some one just as fast as I could, and *made* myself think I was happy. And I should never have forgiven such a trick, never! But he thinks I would have, so I shan't argue with him. He says he *knew* that I loved him, and that sufficient jealousy would enable me to see it for myself. So you can realize how I glory in having discovered it before the plan was finished.

Oh, yes, about the letter. He says he didn't have time to explain it to you. You see, I wrote him a letter chuck-full of humility, and told him I wanted please to marry him immediately. Then your announcement arrived two days later. Oh, agony! I endured torment, and to add to its pangs, Mrs. Barnes forced me to take almost all the medicine John had sent, because she thought I must have contracted some disease.

Well, I sent a telegram posthaste for him not to open the letter, which I knew would reach him that day. But his mother was going downtown shopping, so she took the letter to his office before the message came—and John left on the next train. That's the reason he didn't tell you any more about it. You darling, you darling, to *hemstitch* dish towels for me! I shall use them for handkerchiefs to weep in at your wedding—yours and Mr. Blair's.

I guess it isn't quite morning yet, so I'll tell you about our meeting. It was just three o'clock this afternoon. I was sitting at my desk in the subdued and crushed state into which I have been plunged since last Thursday; and William and Ellen were studying spelling.

I didn't see him until he was at the schoolhouse gate, and he had his back to me. But I knew him. I would know those shoulders in Egypt with my eyes blindfolded. I never will forget the first words he said to me when he stepped in the door:

"Well, honey, I've come."

Imagine *John* saying "honey"! I went straight into his arms with a speller in one hand and some pink chalk in the other. You, William and Ellen, and everything else in the world sailed out of existence, and I spent the most satisfactory two minutes of my life right where I belong. William brought

me back to earth again; John also, I imagine.

"Lordy! An' pa said you was goin' to marry Bill Blair," he gloated, with relieved satisfaction; for nothing can overcome his dislike of Mr. Blair.

"It's a mistake, William," said John, over my shoulder, equally grave. "How is your eye?"

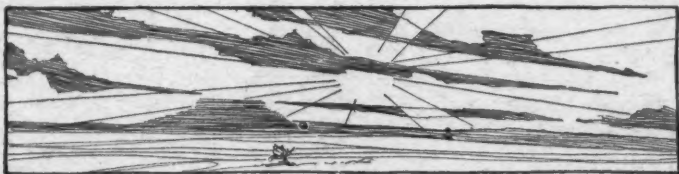
"All right, I guess," grinned William, and then, with an appreciative left-eyed wink: "Ain't she a peach?"—meaning me.

And William and John are friends.

So I dismissed school, for I thought the children had learned enough for one day; and now I'm sleepy, Jane dear; so good night. Please burn and forget my last letter, for I don't think John needs to see it. I never wish to worry him again.

With my love always, RUTH.

P. S.—Tuesday morning. Still happier.



A Spring Song

ROBIN red, robin red, in the blossoms rosy,
Sing a song, sweet and long, to my love to-night.
She'll hear naught, not a thought, of the words I'd tell her—
But to you she'll listen in the fading light.

Robin red, robin red, all in golden measures,
Singing clear to my dear 'neath the apple tree,
Tell her soft, tell her oft of the love I give her.
Sing to her at twilight, sing to her of me!

Robin red, robin red, watch her while she listens,
If she smile, sing a while, all the twilight through,
Should your strain bring her pain, should she, weeping, call me,
Fly, oh, fly and tell me—I shall wait for you!

ALICE E. ALLEN.

Hair Culture: Becoming Coiffures

By Doctor Lillian Whitney

Dr. Whitney is always glad to answer all reasonable questions relating to beauty and health, but she cannot undertake to answer letters which fail to inclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope for reply, or to letters inclosing Canadian stamps. Every week she receives many letters of this sort, in spite of the notice always printed at the end of this department. Sometimes even, the post office sends notification that letters are being held for her, which careless writers have posted with no stamp. If you have failed to receive a reply to your letter, you may know that it is for one of these three reasons.—EDITORS.

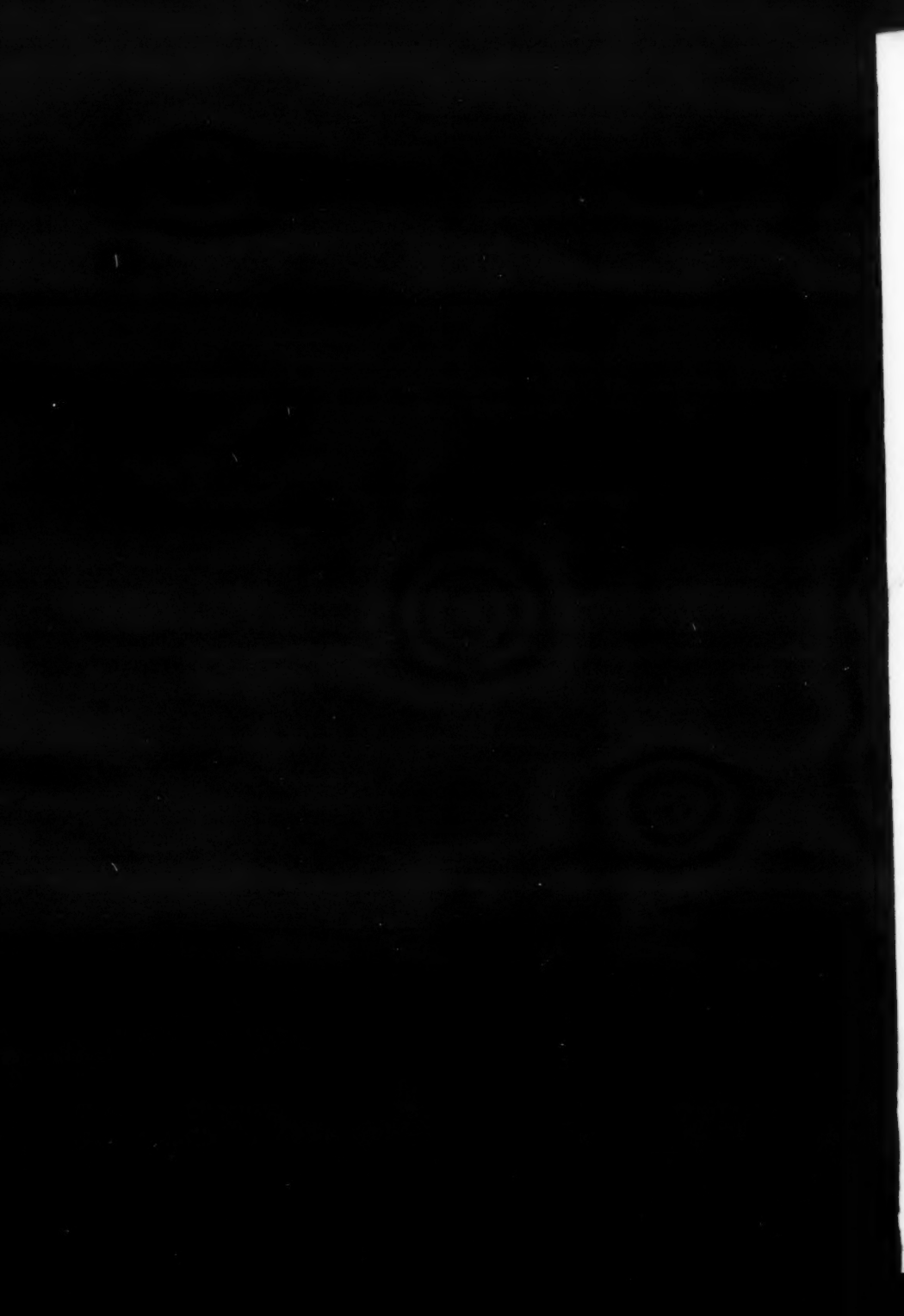
WE never miss the water till the well runs dry," is a homely old adage applicable to many things, not the least of which is the hair, a feature of exceeding importance to the preservation of a youthful and comely appearance. Nevertheless, scant appreciation is accorded it until the hair "runs dry," when dandruff, falling hair, grayness, baldness, and all kinds of troubles ensue, and the entire configuration of the face and head is changed. Scant hair, or the absence thereof, is never becoming, and artificial locks can never take the place of nature's supply.

Prophylaxis is the watchword of modern medicine; it means a guarding against unhealthy conditions. Now, the time to care for the hair is when it least appears to need it. It is then that an occasional shampoo of an indifferent nature and a few minutes' brushing or arranging is all the care it receives. The remaining time given up to the hair is given up to its abuse—scorching and drying it with hot irons; dressing it carelessly and tightly; fastening it close to the scalp and hair roots with metal pins that press on local nerves and blood vessels; overheating the scalp

with artificial pieces; wearing the hair "done up" during sleep.

Women do all these things, while men wear stiff hats many hours of the day that leave a deep ring of depression around the hair, thus attesting to the extent to which nervous impulses and the circulation of blood are interfered with. Stiff hats also overheat the scalp, while the habit of wetting the hair daily has a further tendency to injure the roots. These things, apparently slight in themselves, torture the hair and scalp, and the results are seen by the time middle life is reached, or even earlier, in a general breaking down of the hair.

To the direct neglect and ill treatment mentioned above, must be added the general condition of the body, especially the nerves, because the hair is an appendage of the nervous system. Strange as this may appear to one who is not familiar with the subject, it is nevertheless true that the hair and the nerves have a common origin, and that is the skin or outer covering of the body. So everything that affects the nerves seriously must have a decided action upon the hair. Perhaps the best illustration of this is observed in typhoid fever,



known in German as "nerve fever," in which the hair is usually lost. But any deterioration of the general health affects the hair, and this is notably the case in functional disturbances of the system in which the blood is not in good condition, or in which the nervous system is run down.

Now, one may be perfectly healthy and yet so abuse the hair that it deteriorates early in life; whereas one may be comparatively frail and still, by coaxing and feeding the scalp and brushing and caring for the hair daily, develop it into "a thing of beauty and a joy forever."

Our charms will positively not last throughout life if we do not value them and treat them with the utmost consideration. In all ages and climes and among all people, savage as well as civilized, even among beasts and birds, the outer covering of the body with its appendages—hair, brows, lashes, beard, and the like—has been regarded as a great attraction. It is only within very recent times that men, now fiercely engaged in the mad rush of business for material gain, have lost their marks of virility. But though the hair is no longer looked upon, as it was formerly, as an outward evidence of inward strength, there is no doubt that a beautiful head of hair adds immensely to one's attractiveness, and for this, if for no other reason, should be cultivated.

In the first place, the general health must be guarded, and such measures taken as will maintain it in the best possible condition. Then, of prime importance in the care of the hair is the keeping of the scalp clean and healthy. It may be clean and yet not healthy. A slipshod shampoo is not cleansing, for the hair harbors dust and germs to an extent that would horrify one if it could be viewed under a microscope.

To cleanse the scalp thoroughly every day, it is necessary to brush it thoroughly; if possible, both morning and

night, but always at night. For this purpose several brushes should be kept on hand, and a different one used every day, just as a man has a blade in his razor for each day in the week. A poor brush injures the hair by pulling and tearing it. Good, stiff bristles of the finest quality will last for years, and pay for themselves over and over again. Women with thick, long hair require long-bristled brushes, as the chief object of the brushing is to penetrate to the scalp and remove from it the accumulation of waste matter thrown off by the glands, the loose hairs, and scarf-skin, the dust and débris collected during the day. By this *purposeful brushing*—not done in a haphazard, superficial, or perfunctory manner, but with a purpose and systematically—the scalp is also stimulated; the flow of blood to the parts is increased; and, with a better circulation, the nerves are nourished and strengthened, and *new life is imparted to the hair*, as it quickly and gratefully shows by taking on a brilliant luster and by a new growth.

All brushes should be dipped in ammoniated soapsuds as soon as they show the slightest evidence of soil; at other times they should be thoroughly aired in the sun. A brush should not be placed in water or allowed to "soak"; this is ruinous. Only the bristles should be dipped into the water until they are clean. The brush should then be rinsed, dried with a clean towel, and stood end up in the sun to dry quickly.

The shampoo for cleanliness depends upon the nature of the scalp, which differs materially in different people. A shampoo of water and soap is destructive to some, while others thrive upon it. In cases of extreme dryness, in which the oil glands of the scalp are scant and very inactive, the shampoo should consist of oils. We know that oils and fats are more cleansing than soap and water, but we prefer the effect of the latter. In extreme dryness



Adopt a mode suitable to the contour of the head and neck.

of the scalp, then, an occasional shampoo of oil will be found cleansing, stimulating, and nourishing.

There are a number of very good oils in the market that answer splendidly for this purpose—peanut oil, cotton-seed oil, and coconut oil. A considerable quantity should be used, rubbed very thoroughly into the scalp and hair roots, and then removed with soft, clean, old linen. Fairly new material will not absorb the oil; old, clean linen will alone do this effectually. The scalp and hair must be gone over repeatedly and considerable time devoted to the process. In this way the utmost cleanliness will result, with an additional softening of the scalp and general tonic effect of the oil bath.

When this method of treating the scalp is formed, recourse is rarely had to water, the advocates of an oil shampoo declaring it to be in every way superior to any other. To protect the hair from water while enjoying a shower, which is preferred by many men to a tubbing, a rubber skullcap should always be worn. Indeed, men who have been in the habit of wetting the hair every day cannot break this habit too quickly if they have any regard for their hair.

In cases of extreme oiliness of the scalp, a drying shampoo is called for. Hair specialists have found that frequent washings stimulate an excessively oily scalp. Many women complain that they shampoo every week or two, and yet are troubled with the unpleasant condition that shows itself by marked greasiness and discoloration of the hair roots a day or two after shampooing. Naturally, there must be something ineffectual about the shampoo; soap and water is too stimulating. In such cases cleanliness can be obtained by means of a dry process. The scalp and hair are well powdered with scented corn meal, which is allowed to remain for a half hour or more, and is then thoroughly brushed out. The meal absorbs the grease and dirt, and after such a shampoo the scalp will be found beautifully clean and the hair dry and sweet. This treatment can be pursued as often as is necessary.

For ordinary purposes, a shampoo once a month—with tincture of green soap in cases of dark hair, and soap jelly for light hair—will be quite sufficient, always provided that the daily brushing previously advised is faithfully carried out. This is imperative. From these remarks, it will be seen that the habitual

use of soap and water is no longer advised if the *best results* are desired in the culture of beautiful hair.

The old practice of using water and borax, ammonia, bicarbonate of soda, or cheap alkali soaps is destructive in the extreme, and since the study of hair culture has been taken up scientifically, the methods above advocated have been found so superior to those time-honored means that the latter must be relegated to the background. The scalp is not the kitchen floor, and requires altogether different treatment.

Even when the scalp is healthy, but more especially when it is not, when the hair is scant, thin, and shows little vigor, massage is very effectual. Massage with the finger tips for five or ten minutes before brushing loosens the scalp from its underlying bed. When the scalp is tightly attached to the skull, free circulation of blood is cut off and the hair is not nourished. Friction with the fingers excites electrical currents; there is a tingling of the nerves that is imparted to the blood vessels; soon the circulation begins to awaken from its sluggish flow; a pleasurable warmth is imparted to the scalp; and as this great muscle—with the glands that feed it—is gently loosened from the cranium, it becomes revived and is stimulated to put forth new efforts, just as a plant is coaxed into putting forth new leaves and branches.

At times it becomes necessary to apply stimulating lotions and the like to induce a sluggish scalp to healthy action. When the hair has thinned out and baldness is threatened, the following is good treatment:

Oil of mace $\frac{1}{2}$ ounce
Deodorized mace 1 pint

Rub into the scalp, where the hair is thin, night and morning. For hair that shows a tendency to fall out, a London specialist uses this wash upon his patrons, with beneficial results:

Tincture of cantharides (alcoholic) $2\frac{1}{2}$ ounces
Sesquicarbonate of ammonia 2 drams
Oil of rosemary 20 drops
Glycerin $\frac{1}{2}$ ounce
Jamaica rum $2\frac{1}{2}$ ounces
Mix all very thoroughly and add:
Distilled water 9 ounces

Apply to the hair roots and scalp with a fine sponge or ball of absorbent cotton every night on retiring. This wash is of especial value where the hair has suffered from prolonged illness, such as typhoid fever or neurasthenia, and should be used during convalescence.

Those who are addicted to the systematic use of hot tongs or applications of destroying bleaches, watching the destruction of their hair go on day by day, yet persisting in their ruinous methods, grow panic-stricken as the day approaches when they can no longer dress the hair, when it becomes short, dry, brittle, lifeless, and of ridiculously uneven lengths. When dried out by bleaches, it is especially unsightly, because bleaches have a peculiar effect upon the hair follicles, causing the hair to grow out much darker than its natural shade—although all hair darkens with advancing years.

When the hair has been destroyed in these ways, it takes a long time to restore it, but it can be done, and is being done every day. The methods that have wrought the destructive work must forever be laid aside. If they are continued, and artificial pieces are used to supply the amount necessary for dressing it, there can be only one result—complete ruin of the hair, and then resort must be had to wigs.

The most sensible and by all means the best treatment consists of a radical change of habit. Forswear all methods that have tended to ruin the hair, and assist nature to bring about a cure. Many women, in utter despair, think it best to have what little and wretched hair is left cut off and a wig worn un-

til the hair is restored. This is a great mistake. Wigs are heavy and extremely heating. Cease abusing nature and render every possible help, and the results are surprising.

Let the hair hang unconfined as much as possible, so that the air and sun can freely reach the scalp. When necessary to "do it up," pin it lightly to the crown and cover all with a dainty lace headpiece, to which is attached a curly bang. For dress, it may be necessary to wear a transformation, which should match the shade of one's *natural* hair. The treatment directed toward restoring the hair consists of clipping off all broken and split ends and applying vigorous massage for ten minutes daily to the scalp, rubbing in at the same time some stimulating ointment. Crude petroleum is excellent, so is a fine quality of olive oil. A combination of various oils acts remarkably well in many instances. One of undoubted value follows:

Almond oil	1	pint
Burdock root	$\frac{1}{4}$	pound
Oil of rosemary	$\frac{1}{2}$	ounce
Oil of thyme	$\frac{1}{2}$	ounce
Oil of bergamot	5	drams
Oil of lemon	2	drams
Extract of rose	2	drams

Macerate the burdock root in the almond oil for two days or more, then filter, add the other oils, agitate thoroughly, and use.

The care outlined in the foregoing pages is, of course, highly essential in these cases—thorough daily brushing, daily massage with the use of oils, no further shampoo of any kind; no more abuse, but gentle, persistent use of natural methods and patience will undoubt-

edly restore even hair that has been shorn of all its natural attractiveness.

No feature adds more to the beauty of the face than perfectly groomed, well-dressed hair. In brushing it, the occasional use of brilliantine gives it a desirable luster.

The contour of the face must be studied and that coiffure selected which brings out to the best advantage what beauty points one possesses. If the hair line is attractive, the hair should be brushed well off the face, as the manner in which it grows on the forehead, temples, and around the ears is a special mark of beauty. If the brow is low and broad, the hair should be parted in the center and softly coiled at the nape of the neck. If the profile is more delicate than the full face, a high headdress is more becoming; this also adds to one's height, and is especially desirable for those of short stature.

The back of the head and neck are seldom considered by the average woman in her coiffure arrangement. If the hair grows down in an unattractive manner, the addition of a few curls solves the difficulty at once, and covers a multitude of bad points. Tortoiseshell combs are again fashionable, and to adjust these properly and at the most becoming angle is the finishing touch to an attractive coiffure.

The so-called "corkscrew" pin curls are considered a necessary addition to the simple hairdress which is in great favor just now. That they are obviously artificial, as shown in the illustration, does not seem to detract from their popularity.

NOTE: Formulas for special scalp and hair tonics containing oils will be furnished those desiring them; also treatment for gray hair.

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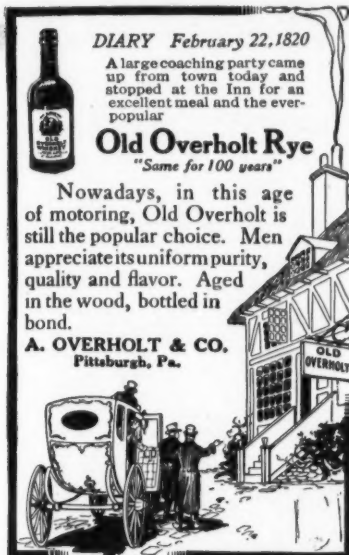
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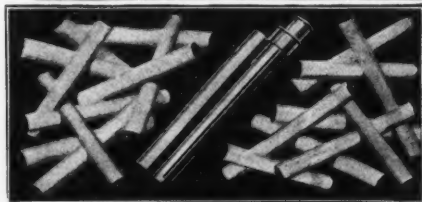
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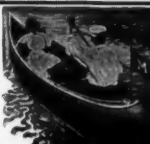
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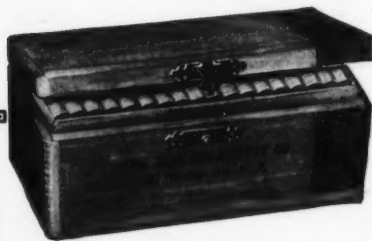
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At fashionable house-parties, gay week-end gatherings, wherever smart American men assemble for recreation, mellow "Bull" Durham tobacco adds to their enjoyment. It is correct, up-to-date, notably stylish to "roll your own" cigarettes with "Bull" Durham—stamps you as a smoker of experience—and that delicate distinctive "Bull" Durham fragrance is always very agreeable to the ladies of the party.

GENUINE "BULL" DURHAM SMOKING TOBACCO

"Bull" Durham is unique among the world's high-class smoking tobaccos—and has been for generations. Millions of smokers find in the fresh cigarettes they fashion to their own liking from this deliciously mild, fragrant tobacco supreme enjoyment and satisfaction obtainable in no other way.

Roll a cigarette with "Bull" Durham today. Learn that original, exquisite aroma—the refreshing smoothness and mellowness—the irresistible appeal of this world-famous tobacco.

FREE

An Illustrated Booklet, showing correct way to "Roll Your Own" Cigarettes, and a package of cigarette papers, will both be mailed, free, to any address in U.S. on request. Address "Bull" Durham, Durham, N.C., Room 1308.

THE AMERICAN TOBACCO COMPANY

Ask for Free
package of
papers,
with each 5c
sack.



SAVE YOUR EYES!

Your eyes are your most valuable possession—upon them your whole happiness and success depends. Here is the very lamp you have been wishing for to **CONCENTRATE** light exactly where you want light, to save eye-strain and to preserve your sight.

The "WALLACE" Portable Electric LAMP Stands, Hangs, Clamps or Sticks

ANY PLACE and at ANY ANGLE you put it.



For Toilet Uses.
Floods figure with light.



Perfect Shaving Lamp.
Stuck to mirror by suction cup.



For Reading in Bed.
Lamp clamped to
Bed-rod.

And when not in use folds into a top-like ball you can carry in your grip when traveling.

Plug
fits any
Socket,
10 feet
of cord.



Lamp standing, ready to be tilted to any angle.

Concealed in base (4) is automatic clamp (5) for fastening lamp to any part of a desk, chair, bed-rod, dressing table, etc.—"iron grip" rubber suction cup (6) for sticking to mirror, window-pane, or any non-porous surface—spring (5) for hanging lamp anywhere—ten feet of extension cord (2) and patent plug which connects with any electric fixture. Shade (1) and socket (3) fit any size or shape bulb. Shade and bulb tilt to any angle you desire.

The "WALLACE" Lamp will stay wherever you put it, in any position desired, and **CONCENTRATE** its light exactly where you want light, whether you are reading, writing, working or doing anything requiring a strong light—always keeping your eyes in the shadow and resting and saving them from strain. Lamp is handsomely and durably made of high grade brass, beautifully nickel-plated. Once used you'll never be without it—it is so convenient.

10 DAYS' FREE TRIAL

Ask for it at your favorite store, or send us a \$2 bill, your personal check, or money order, and a "WALLACE"

will be sent you by parcel post prepaid. Use it 10 days, and if not entirely satisfied, return it and we will promptly refund your money. Saving your eyesight is worth twenty times \$2. Write now before you forget it.

THE WALLACE NOVELTY CO., Inc.
Patentees and Sole Mfrs.
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Big Opportunity for Agents

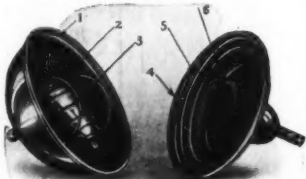
Must be hustlers with selling experience, and enough capital to carry stock required. Write for proposition and proof.

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